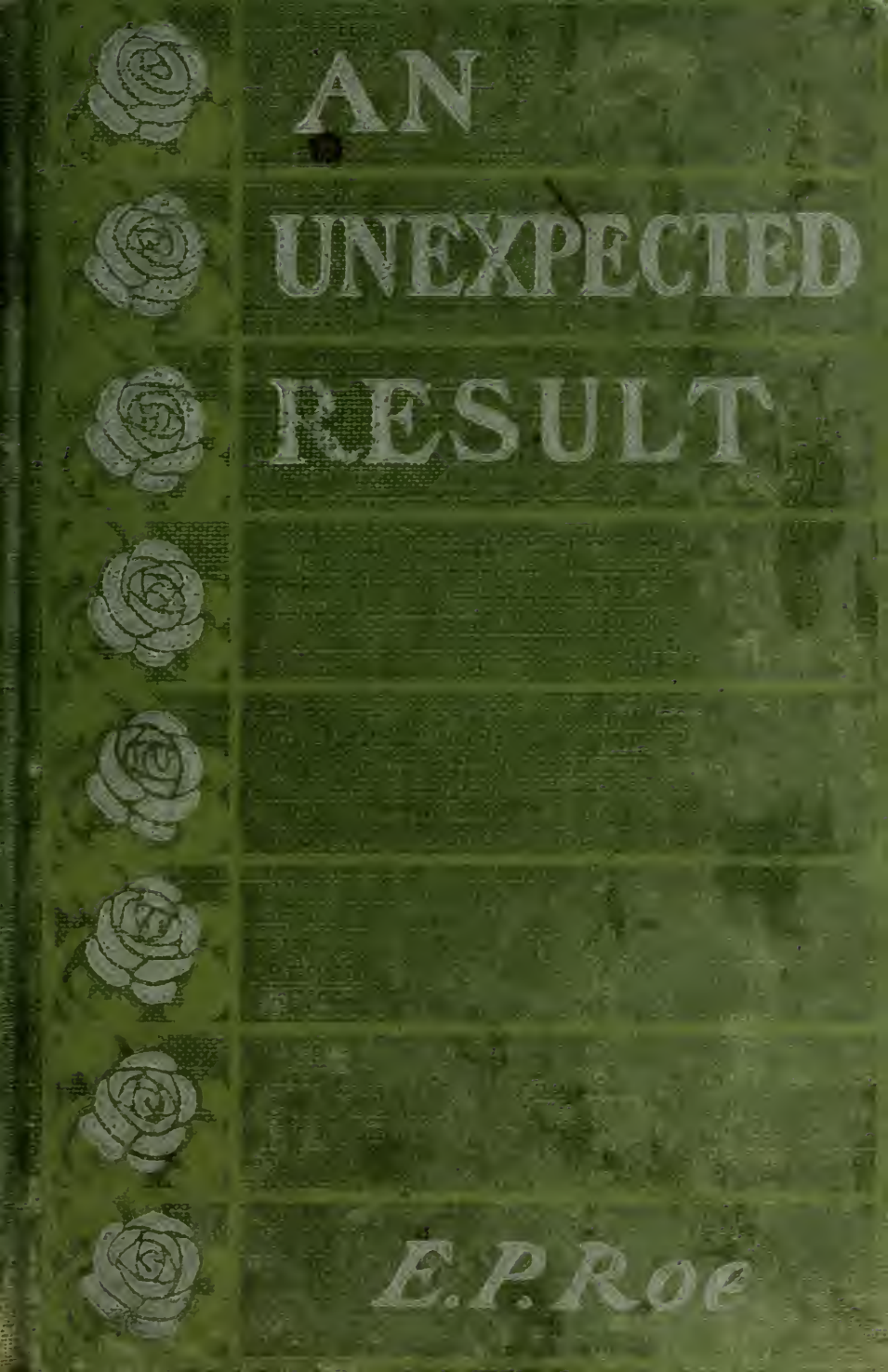
AN
UNEXPECTED
RESULT
E. P. Roe

An Unexpected Result

And Other Stories

By

E. P. ROE

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I.

AN UNEXPECTED RESULT.

"JACK, she played with me deliberately, heartlessly. I can never forgive her."

"In that case, Will, I congratulate you. Such a girl isn't worth a second thought, and you've made a happy escape."

"No congratulations, if you please. You can talk coolly, because in regard to such matters you are cool, and, I may add, a trifle cold. Ambition is your mistress, and a musty law book has more attractions for you than any woman living. I'm not so tempered. I am subject to the general law of nature, and a woman's love and sympathy are essential to success in my life and work."

"That's all right, but there are as good fish—"

"Oh, have done with your trite nonsense," interrupted Will Munson impatiently. "I'd consult you on a point of law in preference to most of the graybeards, but I was a fool to speak of this affair. And yet as my most intimate friend—"

"Come, Will, I'm not unfeeling," and John Ackland rose and put his hand on his friend's shoulder. "I admit that the subject is remote from my line of thought and wholly beyond my experience. If the affair is so serious I shall take it to heart."

"Serious! Is it a slight thing to be crippled for life?"

"Oh, come now," said Ackland, giving his friend a hearty and encouraging thump, "you are sound in mind and limb; what matters a scratch on the heart to a man not twenty-five?"

"Very well; I'll say no more about it. When I need a lawyer I'll come to you. Good-by; I sail for Brazil in the morning."

"Will, sit down and look me in the eyes," said Ackland decisively. "Will, forgive me. You *are* in trouble. A man's eyes usually tell

me more than all his words, and I don't like the expression of yours. There is yellow fever in Brazil."

"I know it," was the careless reply.

"What excuse have you for going?"

"Business complications have arisen there, and I promptly volunteered to go. My employers were kind enough to hesitate and warn me, and to say that they could send a man less valuable to them, but I soon overcame their objections."

"That is your excuse for going. The reason I see in your eyes. You are reckless, Will."

"I have reason to be."

"I can't agree with you, but I feel for you all the same. Tell me all about it, for this is sad news to me. I hoped to have joined you on the beach in a few days, and to have spent August with you and my cousin. I confess I am beginning to feel exceedingly vindictive toward this pretty little monster, and if any harm comes to you I shall be savage enough to scalp her."

"The harm has come already, Jack. I'm hit hard. She showed me a mirage of happi-

ness that has made my present world a desert. I *am* reckless — I'm desperate. You may think it is weak and unmanly, but you don't know anything about it. Time or the fever may cure me, but now I am bankrupt in all that gives value to life. A woman with an art so consummate that it seemed artless, deliberately evoked the best there was in me, then threw it away as indifferently as a cast-off glove."

"Tell me how it came about."

"How can I tell you? How can I in cold-blood recall glances, words, intonations, the pressure of a hand that seemed alive with reciprocal feeling? In addition to her beauty she had the irresistible charm of fascination. I was wary at first, but she angled for me with a skill that would have disarmed any man who did not believe in the inherent falseness of woman. The children in the house idolized her, and I have great faith in a child's intuitions."

"Oh, that was only a part of her guile," said Ackland frowningly.

"Probably; at any rate she has taken all

the color and zest out of my life. I wish some one could pay her back in her own coin. I don't suppose she has a heart, but I wish her vanity might be wounded in a way that would teach her a lesson never to be forgotten."

"It certainly would be a well-deserved retribution," said Ackland musingly.

"Jack, you are the one, of all the world, to administer the punishment. I don't believe a woman's smiles ever quickened your pulse one beat."

"You are right, Will, it is my cold-bloodedness—to put your thought in plain English—that will prove your best ally."

"I only hope that I am not leading you into danger. You will need an Indian's stoicism."

"Bah! I may fail ignominiously, and find her vanity invulnerable, but I pledge you my word that I will avenge you if it be within the compass of my skill. My cousin, Mrs. Alston, may prove a useful ally. I think you wrote me that the name of this siren was Eva Van Tyne?"

"Yes; I only wish she had the rudiments

of a heart, so that she might feel, in a faint, far-off way, a little of the pain she has inflicted on me. Don't let her make you falter or grow remorseful, Jack. Remember that you have given a pledge to one who may be dead before you can fulfil it."

Ackland said farewell to his friend with the fear that he might never see him again, and a few days later found himself at a New England seaside resort, with a relentless purpose lurking in his dark eyes. Mrs. Alston did unconsciously prove a useful ally, for her wealth and elegance gave her unusual prestige in the house, and in joining her party Ackland achieved immediately all the social recognition he desired.

While strolling with this lady on the piazza he observed the object of his quest, and was at once compelled to make more allowance than he had done hitherto for his friend's discomfiture. Two or three children were leaning over the young girl's chair, and she was amusing them by some clever caricatures. She was not so interested, however, but that she soon noted the new comer, and bestowed upon him from

time to time curious and furtive glances. That these were not returned seemed to occasion her some surprise, for she was not accustomed to be so utterly ignored, even by a stranger. A little later Ackland saw her consulting the hotel register.

"I have at least awakened her curiosity," he thought.

"I've been waiting for you to ask me who that pretty girl was," said Mrs. Alston, laughing; "you do indeed exceed all men in indifference toward our sex."

"I know all about that girl," was the grim reply. "She has played the very deuce with my friend Munson."

"Yes," replied Mrs. Alston indignantly, "it was the most shameful piece of coquetry I ever saw. She is a puzzle to me. To the children and the old people in the house she is consideration and kindness itself, but she appears to regard men of your years as legitimate game and is perfectly remorseless. So beware. She is dangerous, invulnerable as you imagine yourself to be. She will practise her wiles upon you if you give her half a chance.

and her art has much more than her pretty face to enforce it. She is unusually clever."

Ackland's slight shrug was so contemptuous that his cousin was nettled, and she thought, "I wish the girl could disturb his complacent equanimity just a little; it vexes one to see a man so indifferent; it's a slight to our sex," and she determined to give Miss Van Tyne the vantage-ground of an introduction at the first opportunity.

And this occurred before the evening was over. To her surprise Ackland entered into an extended conversation with the enemy. "Well," she thought, "if he begins in this style there will soon be another victim. Miss Van Tyne can talk to as bright a man as he is and hold her own. Meanwhile she will assail him in a hundred covert ways. Out of regard for his friend he should have shown some disapproval of her, but there he sits quietly talking in the publicity of the parlor."

"Mrs. Alston," said a friend at her elbow, "you ought to forewarn your cousin and tell him of Mr. Munson's fate."

"He knows all about Mr. Munson," was

her reply. "Indeed, the latter is his most intimate friend. I suppose my cousin is indulging in a little natural curiosity concerning this destroyer of masculine peace, and if ever a man could do so in safety he can."

"Why so?"

"Well, I never knew so unsusceptible a man. With the exception of a few of his relatives, he has never cared for ladies' society."

Mrs. Alston was far astray in supposing that curiosity was Ackland's motive in his rather prolonged conversation with Miss Van Tyne. It was simply a part of his tactics, for he proposed to waste no time in skirmishing or in guarded and gradual approaches. He would cross weapons at once, and secure his object by a sharp and aggressive campaign. His object was to obtain immediately some idea of the calibre of the girl's mind, and in this respect he was agreeably surprised, for while giving little evidence of thorough education, she was unusually intelligent and exceedingly quick in her perceptions. He soon learned also that she was gifted with more than woman's customary intuition, that she was watching his

face closely for meanings that he might not choose to express in words or else to conceal by his language. While he feared that his task would be far more difficult than he expected, and that he would have to be extremely guarded in order not to reveal his design, he was glad to learn that the foe was worthy of his steel. Meanwhile her ability and self-reliance banished all compunction. He had no scruples in humbling the pride of a woman who was at once so proud, so heartless, and so clever. Nor would the effort be wearisome, for she had proved herself both amusing and interesting. He might enjoy it quite as much as an intricate law case.

Even prejudiced Ackland, as he saw her occasionally on the following day, was compelled to admit that she was more than pretty. Her features were neither regular nor faultless. Her mouth was too large to be perfect and her nose was not Grecian, but her eyes were peculiarly fine and illumined her face, whose chief charm lay in its power of expression. If she chose, almost all her thoughts and feelings could find their reflex there. The trouble was

that she could as readily mask her thought and express what she did not feel. Her eyes were of the darkest blue and her hair seemed light in contrast. It was evident that she had studied grace so thoroughly that her manner and carriage appeared unstudied and natural. She never seemed self-conscious, and yet no one had ever seen her in an ungainly posture or had known her to make an awkward gesture. This grace, however, like a finished style in writing, was tinged so strongly with her own individuality that it appeared original as compared with the fashionable monotony which characterized the manners of so many of her age. She could not have been much more than twenty, and yet, as Mrs. Alston took pains to inform her cousin, she had long been in society, adding, "It's homage is her breath of life, and from all I hear your friend Munson has had many predecessors. Be on your guard."

"Your solicitude in my behalf is quite touching," he replied. "Who is this fair buccaneer that has made so many wrecks and exacts so heavy a revenue from society? Who

has the care of her and what are her antecedents?"

"She is an orphan and possessed, I am told, of considerable property in her own name. A forceless, nerveless maiden aunt is about the only antecedent we see much of. Her guardian has been here once or twice, but practically she is independent."

Miss Van Tyne's efforts to learn something concerning Ackland were apparently quite as casual and indifferent and yet were made with utmost skill. She knew that Mrs. Alston's friend was something of a gossip, and she led her to speak of the subject of her thoughts with an indirect *finesse* that would have amused the young man exceedingly could he have been an unobserved witness. When she learned that he was Mr. Munson's intimate friend and that he was aware of her treatment of the latter, she was somewhat disconcerted. One so forewarned might not become an easy prey. But the additional fact that he was almost a woman-hater put her upon her mettle at once, and she felt that here was a chance for a conquest such as she had never made before. She

now believed that she had discovered the key to his indifference. He was ready enough to amuse himself with her as a clever woman, but knew her too well to bestow upon her even a friendly thought.

"If I can bring him to my feet it will be a triumph indeed," she murmured exultantly, "and at my feet he shall be if he gives me half a chance." Seemingly he gave her every chance that she could desire, and while he scarcely made any effort to seek her society, she noted with secret satisfaction that he often appeared as if accidentally near her, and that he ever made it the easiest and most natural thing in the world for her to join him. His conversation was often as gay and unconventional as she could wish, but she seldom failed to detect in it an uncomfortable element of satire and irony. He always left her dissatisfied with herself and with a depressing consciousness that she had made no impression upon him.

His conquest grew into an absorbing desire, and she unobtrusively brought to bear upon him every art and fascination that she possess-

ed. Her toilets were as exquisite as they were simple. The children were made to idolize her more than ever, but Ackland was candid enough to admit that this was not all guile on her part, for she was evidently in sympathy with the little people, who can rarely be imposed upon by any amount of false interest. Indeed, he saw no reason to doubt that she abounded in good-nature toward all except the natural objects of her ruling passion; but the very skill and deliberateness with which she sought to gratify this passion greatly increased his vindictive feeling. He saw how naturally and completely his friend had been deceived and how exquisite must have been the hopes and anticipations so falsely raised. Therefore he smiled more grimly at the close of each succeeding day, and was fully bent upon the accomplishment of his purpose.

At length Miss Van Tyne changed her tactics and grew quite oblivious to Ackland's presence in the house, but she found him apparently too indifferent to observe the fact. She then permitted one of her several admirers to become devoted; Ackland did not offer the

protest of even a glance. He stood, as it were, just where she had left him, ready for an occasional chat, stroll or excursion, if the affair came about naturally and without much effort on his part. She found that she could not induce him to seek her or annoy him by an indifference which she meant should be more marked than his own.

Some little time after there came a windy day, and the surf was so heavy that there were but few bathers. Ackland was a good swimmer, and took his plunge as usual. He was leaving the water when Miss Van Tyne ran down the beach and was about to dart through the breakers in her wonted fearless style.

"Be careful," he said to her; "the undertow is strong, and the man who has charge of the bathing is ill and not here. The tide is changing—in fact, running out already I believe." But she would not even look at him, much less answer. As there were other gentlemen present he started for his bath-house, but had proceeded but a little way up the beach before a cry brought him to the water's edge instantly.

"Something is wrong with Miss Van Tyne," cried half a dozen voices. "She ventured out recklessly, and it seems as if she couldn't get back."

At that moment her form rose on the crest of a wave, and above the thunder of the surf came her faint cry, "Help!"

The other bathers stood irresolute, for she was dangerously far out, and the tide had evidently turned. Ackland, on the contrary, dashed through the breakers and then, in his efforts for speed, dove through the waves nearest to the shore. When he reached the place where he expected to find her he saw nothing for a moment or two but great crested billows that every moment were increasing in height under the rising wind. For a moment he feared that she had perished, and the thought that the beautiful creature had met her death so suddenly and awfully made him almost sick and faint. An instant later, however, a wave threw her up from the trough of the sea into full vision somewhat on his right, and a few strong strokes brought him to her side.

"Oh, save me!" she gasped.

"Don't cling to me," he said sternly. "Do as I bid you. Strike out for the shore if you are able; if not, lie on your back and float."

She did the latter, for now that aid had reached her she apparently recovered from her panic and was perfectly tractable. He placed his left hand under her and struck out quietly, aware that the least excitement causing exhaustion on his part might cost both of them their lives.

As they approached the shore a rope was thrown to them, and Ackland, who felt his strength giving way, seized it desperately. He passed his arm around his companion with a grasp that almost made her breathless, and they were dragged, half suffocated, through the water until strong hands on either side rushed them through the breakers.

Miss Van Tyne for a moment or two stood dazed and panting, then disengaged herself from the rather warm support of the devoted admirer whom she had tried to play against Ackland, and tried to walk, but after a few uncertain steps fell senseless on the sand, thus

for the moment drawing to herself the attention of the increasing throng. Ackland, glad to escape notice, was staggering off to his bath-house when several ladies, more mindful of his part in the affair than the men had been, overtook him with a fire of questions and plaudits.

"Please leave me alone," he said, almost savagely, without looking around.

"What a bear he is!" they chorused. "Any one else would have been a little complacent over such an exploit." And they followed the unconscious girl who was now being carried to the hotel.

Ackland locked the door of his little apartment and sank panting on the bench. "Maledictions on her!" he muttered. "At one time there was a better chance of her being fatal to me than to Munson with his yellow-fever tragedy in prospect. Her recklessness to-day was perfectly insane. If she tries it again she may drown for all that I care, or at least ought to care."

His anger appeared to act like a tonic, and he was soon ready to return to the house. A

dozen sprang forward to congratulate him, but they found such impatience and annoyance at all reference to the affair that with many surmises the topic was dropped.

"You are a queer fellow," remarked his privileged cousin, as he took her out to dinner. "Why don't you let people speak naturally about the matter, or rather why don't you pose as the hero of the occasion?"

"Because the whole affair was most unnatural and I am deeply incensed. In a case of necessity I am ready to risk my life, although it has unusual attractions for me, but I'm no melodramatic hero looking for adventures. What necessity was there in this case? It is the old story of Munson over again in another guise. The act was that of an inconsiderate, heartless woman who follows her impulses and inclinations no matter what may be the consequences." After a moment he added, less indignantly, "I must give her credit for one thing, angry as I am—she behaved well in the water, otherwise she would have drowned me."

"She is not a fool. Most women would have drowned you."

"She is indeed not a fool; therefore she's the more to blame. If she is ever so reckless again may I be asleep in my room. Of course one can't stand by and see a woman drown, no matter who or what she is."

"Jack, what made her so reckless?" Mrs. Alston asked, with a sudden intelligence lighting up her face.

"Hang it all! How should I know? What made her torture Munson? She follows her impulses, and they are not always conducive to any one's well-being, not even her own."

"Mark my words, she has never shown this kind of recklessness before."

"Oh yes, she has. She was running her horse to death the other hot morning and nearly trampled on a child;" and he told of an unexpected encounter while he was taking a rather extended ramble.

"Well," exclaimed Mrs. Alston, smiling significantly, "I think I understand her symptoms better than you do. If you are as cold-blooded as you seem I may have to interfere."

"O bah!" he answered impatiently. "Pardon me, but I should despise myself forever

should I become sentimental, knowing what I do."

"Jack, had you no compunctions when fearing that such a beautiful girl might perish? We are going to have an awful night. Hear the wind whistle and moan, and the sky is already black with clouds. The roar of the surf grows louder every hour. Think of that lovely form being out in those black, angry waves, darted at and preyed upon by horrible slimy monsters. Oh, it fairly makes my flesh creep!"

"And mine, too," he said, with a strong gesture of disgust; "especially when I remember that I should have kept her company, for of course I could not return without her. I confess that when at first I could not find her I was fairly sick at the thought of her fate. But remember how uncalled for it all was—quite as much so as that poor Will Munson is on his way to die with the yellow fever like enough."

"Jack," said his cousin, affectionately, laying her hand on his arm, "blessings on your courage to-day. If what might have happened so easily had occurred, I could never have

looked upon the sea again without a shudder. I should have been tormented by a horrible memory all my life. It was brave and noble—"

"Oh, hush!" he said angrily. "I won't hear another word about it even from you. I'm not brave and noble. I went because I was compelled to go; I hated to go; I hate the girl, and have more reason now than ever. If we had both drowned, no doubt there would have been less trouble in the world. There would have deen one lawyer the less, and a coquette extinguished. Now we shall both prey on society in our different ways indefinitely."

"Jack, you are in an awful mood today."

"I am—never was in a worse."

"Having so narrowly escaped death you ought to be subdued and grateful."

"On the contrary, I'm inclined to profanity. Excuse me—don't wish any dessert. I'll try a walk and a cigar. You will now be glad to be rid of me on any terms."

"Stay, Jack. See, Miss Van Tyne has so

far recovered as to come down. She looked unutterable things toward you as she entered."

"Of course she did. Very few of her thoughts concerning me or other young men would sound well if uttered. Tell your friends to let this topic alone, or I shall be rude to them," and without a glance toward the girl he had rescued he left the dining-room.

"Well, well," murmured Mrs. Alston, "I never saw Jack in such a mood before. It is quite as unaccountable as Miss Van Tyne's recklessness. I wonder what is the matter with *him*."

Ackland was speedily driven back from his walk by the rain, which fact he did not regret, for he found himself exhausted and depressed. Seeking a retired piazza in order to be alone, he sat down with his hat drawn over his eyes and smoked furiously. Before very long, however, he was startled out of a painful reverie by a timid voice saying:

"Mr. Ackland, won't you permit me to thank you?"

He rose, and Miss Van Tyne stood before

him with outstretched hand. He did not notice it, but bowing coldly, said :

" Please consider that you have thanked me and let the subject drop."

" Do not be so harsh with me," she pleaded. " I cannot help it if you are. Mr. Ackland, you saved my life."

" Possibly."

" And possibly you think that it is scarcely worth saving."

" Possibly your own conscience suggested that thought to you."

" You are heartless," she burst out indignantly.

He began to laugh. " That's a droll charge for you to make," he said.

She looked at him steadfastly for a moment, and then murmured : " You are thinking of your friend Mr. Munson."

" That would be quite natural. How many more can you think of ?"

" You are indeed unrelenting," she faltered, tears coming into her eyes ; " but I cannot forget that but for you I should now be out there"—and she indicated the sea by a gest-

ure, then covered her face with her hands and shuddered.

"Do not feel under obligations. I should have been compelled to do as much for any human being. You seem to forget that I stood an even chance of being out there with you, and that there was no more need of the risk than there was that my best friend's life should be blight—"

"You—you out there?" she cried, springing toward him and pointing to the sea.

"Certainly. You cannot suppose that, having once found you, I could come ashore without you. As it was my strength was rapidly giving way, and were it not for the rope—"

"Oh, forgive me," she cried, passionately seizing his hand in spite of him. "It never entered my mind that you could drown. I somehow felt that nothing could harm you. I was reckless—I didn't know what I was doing—I don't understand myself any more. Please—please forgive me, or I shall not sleep to-night."

"Certainly," he said lightly, "if you will not refer to our little episode again."

"Please don't speak in that way," she sighed, turning away.

"I have complied with your request."

"I suppose I must be content," she resumed sadly. Then turning her head slowly toward him she added, hesitatingly, "Will you forgive me for—for treating your friend—"

"No," he replied, with such stern emphasis that she shrank from him and trembled.

"You are indeed heartless," she faltered, as she turned to leave him.

"Miss Van Tyne," he said indignantly, "twice you have charged me with being heartless. Your voice and manner indicate that I would be unnatural and unworthy of respect were I what you charge. In the name of all that's rational what does this word 'heartless' mean to you? Where was your heart when you sent my friend away so wretched and humbled that he is virtually seeking the death from which you are so glad to escape?"

"I did not love him," she protested faintly.

He laughed bitterly, and continued: "Love! That's a word which I believe has no meaning for you at all, but it had for him. You are a

remarkably clever woman, Miss Van Tyne. You have brains in abundance. See, I do you justice. What is more you are so beautiful and can be so fascinating that a man who believed in you might easily worship you. You made him believe in you. You tried to beguile me into a condition that with my nature would be ruin indeed. You never had the baby plea of a silly, shallow woman. I took pains to find that out the first evening we met. In your art of beguiling an honest, trusting man you were as perfect as you were remorseless, and you understood exactly what you were doing."

For a time she seemed overwhelmed by his lava-like torrent of words, and stood with bowed head and a shrinking, trembling form, but when he ceased she turned to him and said, bitterly and emphatically :

"I did *not* understand what I was doing, nor would my brain have taught me were I all intellect like yourself. I half wish you had left me to drown," and with a slight despairing gesture she turned away and did not look back.

Ackland's face lighted up with a sudden flash of intelligence and deep feeling. He started to recall her, hesitated and watched her earnestly until she disappeared ; then looking out on the scowling ocean, he took off his hat and exclaimed in a deep, low tone :

" By all that's divine, can this be ? Is it possible that through the suffering of her own awakening heart she is learning to know the pain she has given to others ? Should this be true, the affair is taking an entirely new aspect, and Munson will be avenged as neither of us ever dreamed would be possible."

He resumed his old position and thought long and deeply, then rejoined his cousin, who was somewhat surprised to find that his bitter mood had given place to his former composure.

" How is this, Jack ?" she asked. " As the storm grows wilder without, you become more serene."

" Only trying to make amends for my former bearishness," he said carelessly, but with a little rising color.

" I don't understand you at all," she con-

tinued, discontentedly. "I saw you sulking in that out-of-the-way corner, and I saw Miss Van Tyne approach you hesitatingly and timidly with the purpose no doubt of thanking you. Of course I did not stay to watch, but a little later I met Miss Van Tyne, and she looked white and rigid. She has not left her room since."

"You take a great interest in Miss Van Tyne. It is well you are not in my place."

"I half wish I was and had your chances. You are more pitiless than the waves from which you saved her."

"I can't help being just what I am," he said coldly. "Good-night." And he too disappeared for the rest of the evening.

The rain continued to fall in blinding torrents and the building fairly trembled under the violence of the wind. The guests drew together in the lighted rooms, and sought by varied amusements to pass the time until the fierceness of the storm abated, few caring to retire while the uproar of the elements was so great.

At last as the storm passed away, and the late

rising moon threw a sickly gleam on the tumultuous waters, Eva looked from her window with sleepless eyes, thinking sadly and bitterly of the past and future. Suddenly a dark figure appeared on the beach in the track of the moonlight. She snatched an opera-glass, but could not recognize the solitary form. The thought would come, however, that it was Ackland, and if it were, what were his thoughts and what place had she in them? Why was he watching so near the spot that might have been their burial-place?

"At least he shall not think that I can stolidly sleep after what has occurred," she thought, and she turned up her light, opened her window and sat down by it again. Whoever the unseasonable rambler might be he appeared to recognize the gleam from her window, for he walked hastily down the beach and disappeared. After a time she darkened her room again and waited in vain for his return. "If it were he, he shuns even the slightest recognition," she thought despairingly, and the early dawn was not far distant when she fell into an unquiet sleep.

For the next few days Miss Van Tyne was a puzzle to all except Mrs. Alston. She was quite unlike the girl she had formerly been and she made no effort to disguise the fact. In the place of her old exuberance of life and spirits, there were lassitude and great depression. The rich color ebbed steadily from her face, and dark lines under her eyes betokened sleepless nights. She saw the many curious glances directed toward her, but apparently did not care what was thought or surmised. Were it not that her manner toward Ackland was so misleading the tendency to couple their names together would have been far more general. She neither sought nor shunned his society, and in fact treated him as she did the other gentlemen of her acquaintance. She took him at his word. He had said he would forgive her on condition that she would not speak of what he was pleased to term that "little episode," and she never referred to it.

Her aunt was as much at fault as the others, and one day querulously complained to Mrs. Alston that she was growing anxious about Eva. "At first I thought she was disappoint-

ed over the indifference of that icy cousin of yours, but she does not appear to care a straw for him. When I mention his name she speaks of him in a natural, grateful way, then her thoughts appear to wander off to some matter that is troubling her. I can't find out whether she is ill or whether she has heard some bad news of which she will not speak. She never gave me or any one that I know of much of her confidence."

Mrs. Alston listened but made no comments. She was sure she was right in regard to Miss Van Tyne's trouble, but her cousin mystified her. Ackland had become perfectly inscrutable. As far as she could judge by any word or act of his he had simply lost his interest in Miss Van Tyne, and that was all that could be said, and yet a fine instinct tormented Mrs. Alston with the doubt that this was not true and that the young girl was the subject of a sedulously concealed scrutiny. Was he watching for his friend or for his own sake, or was he, in a spirit of retaliation, enjoying the suffering of one who had made others suffer? His reserve was so great that she could not pierce

it, and his caution baffled even her vigilance. But she waited patiently, assured that the little drama must soon pass into a more significant phase.

And she was right. Miss Van Tyne could not maintain the line of action she had resolved upon. She had thought, "I won't try to appear happy when I am not. I won't adopt the conventional mask of gayety when the heart is wounded. How often I have seen through it and smiled at the transparent farce —farce it seemed then, but I now fear it was often tragedy. At any rate there was neither dignity nor deception in it. I have done with being false, and so shall simply act myself and be a lady. Though my heart break a thousand times, not even by a glance shall I show that it is breaking for him. If he or others surmise the truth they may. Let them. It is a part of my penance, and I will show the higher, stronger pride of one who makes no vain, useless pretence to happy indifference, but who can maintain a self-control so perfect that even Mrs. Alston shall not see one unmaidenly advance or overture."

And she succeeded for a time as we have seen, but she overrated her will and underrated her heart that with a deepening intensity craved the love denied her. With increasing frequency she said to herself, "I must go away. My only course is to hide my weakness and never see him again. He is inflexible, and yet his very obduracy increases my love a hundredfold."

At last after a lonely walk on the beach she concluded: "My guardian must take me home on Monday next. He comes to-night to spend Sunday with us, and I will make preparations to go at once."

Although her resolution did not fail her she walked forward more and more slowly, and her dejection and weariness were almost overpowering. As she was turning a sharp angle of rocks that jutted well down toward the water she came face to face with Ackland and Mrs. Alston. She was off her guard, and her thoughts of him had been so absorbing that she felt he must be conscious of them. She flushed painfully, and at first it seemed that she would hurry by with slight recognition and

downcast face, but she had scarcely passed them before, acting under a sudden impulse, she stopped and said in a low tone :

" Mr. Ackland—"

He turned expectantly toward her, and she either forgot or ignored Mrs. Alston. For a moment she found it difficult to speak, and then her face became pale and resolute.

" Mr. Ackland, I must refer once more to a topic which you have in a sense forbidden. I feel partially absolved, however, for I do not think you have forgiven me anything. At any rate I must ask your pardon once more for having so needlessly and foolishly imperilled your life. I say these words now because I may not have another opportunity ; we leave on Monday." And she raised her eyes to his with an appeal for a little kindness which Mrs. Alston was confident could not be resisted. Indeed she was sure that she saw a slight nervous tremor in Ackland's hands as if he found it hard to control himself. Then he appeared to grow rigid. Lifting his hat he said gravely and unresponsively :

" Miss Van Tyne, you now surely have made

ample amends. Please forget the whole affair."

She turned from him at once, but not so quickly but that both he and his cousin saw the bitter tears that would come. A moment later she was hidden by the angle of the rock. As long as she was visible Ackland watched her without moving, and then he slowly turned toward his cousin and his face was as inscrutable as ever. She walked at his side for a few moments in ill-concealed impatience, then stopped and said decisively :

"I'll go no farther with you to-day. I am losing all respect for you."

Without speaking he turned to accompany her back to the house. His reticence and coldness appeared to annoy her beyond endurance, for she soon stopped and sat down on a ledge of the rocks that jutted down the beach where they had met Miss Van Tyne.

"John, you are the most unnatural man I ever saw in my life," she began angrily.

"What reason have you for so flattering an opinion," he asked coolly.

"You have been giving reason for it every

day since you came here," she resumed hotly. "I always heard it said that you had no heart, but I defended you and declared that your course toward your mother even when a boy showed that you had, and that you would prove it some day. But I now believe that you are unnaturally cold, heartless and unfeeling. I had no objection to your wounding Miss Van Tyne's vanity and encouraged you when that alone bid fair to suffer. But when she proved she had a heart and that you had awakened it, she deserved at least kindness and consideration on your part. If you could not return her affection, you should have gone away at once. But I believe that you have stayed for the sole and cruel purpose of gloating over her suffering."

"She has not suffered more than my friend or than I would if—"

"You indeed! The idea of you suffering from any such cause! I half believe you came here with the deliberate purpose of avenging your friend, and that you are keeping for his inspection a diary in which the poor girl's humiliation to-day will form the hateful climax."

They did not dream that the one most interested was near. Miss Van Tyne had felt too faint and sorely wounded to go farther without rest. Believing that the rocks would hide her from those whose eyes she would most wish to shun, she had thrown herself down beyond the angle and was shedding the bitterest tears that she had ever known. Suddenly she heard Mrs. Alston's words but a short distance away, and was so overcome by their import that she hesitated what to do. She would not meet them again for the world, but felt so weak that she doubted whether she could drag herself away without being discovered, especially as the beach trended off to the left so sharply a little farther on that they might discover her. While she was looking vainly for some way of escape she heard Ackland's words and Mrs. Alston's surmise in reply that he had come with the purpose of revenge. She was so stung by their apparent truth that she resolved to clamber up through an opening of the rocks if the thing were possible. Panting and exhausted she gained the summit, and then hastened to an adjacent grove, as some wound-

ed, timid creature would run to the nearest cover. Ackland had heard sounds and had stepped around the point of the rocks just in time to see her disappearing above the bank. Returning to Mrs. Alston he said impatiently :

" In view of your opinions my society can have no attractions for you. Shall I accompany you to the hotel ?"

" No," was the angry reply. " I'm in no mood to speak to you again to-day."

He merely bowed and turned as if to pursue his walk. The moment she was hidden, however, he also climbed the rocks in time to see Miss Van Tyne entering the grove. With swift and silent tread he followed her, but could not at once discover her hiding-place. At last passionate sobs made it evident that she was concealed behind a great oak a little on his left. Approaching cautiously he heard her moan :

" Oh, this is worse than death ! He makes me feel as if even God had no mercy for me. But I will expiate my wrong—I will, at the bitterest sacrifice which a woman can make."

She sprang up and Ackland stood before her

with folded arms. She started violently and leaned against the tree for support. But the weakness was momentary, for she wiped the tears from her eyes, and then turned toward him so quietly that only her extreme pallor proved that she realized the import of her words.

"Mr. Ackland," she asked, "have you Mr. Munson's address?"

It was his turn now to start, but he merely answered, "Yes."

"Do—do you think he still cares for me?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Since then you are so near a friend, will you write to him that I will try"—she turned away and would not look at him as, after a moment's hesitation, she concluded her sentence—"I will try to make him as happy as I can."

"Do you regret your course?" he asked, with a slight tremor in his voice.

"I regret that I misled—that I wronged him beyond all words. I am willing to make all the amends in my power."

"Do you love him?"

She now turned wholly away and shook her head.

"And yet you would marry him?"

"Yes, if he wished it, knowing all the truth."

"Can you believe he would wish it?" he asked indignantly. "Can you believe that any man—"

"Then avenge him to your cruel soul's content," she exclaimed passionately. "Tell him that I have no heart to give to him or to any one. Through no effort or fault of mine I overheard Mrs. Alston's words and yours. I know your design against me. Assuage your friend's grief by assuring him of your entire success of which you are already so well aware. Tell him how you triumphed over an untaught, thoughtless girl who was impelled merely by the love of power and excitement as you are governed by ambition and a remorseless will. I did not know—I did not understand how cruel I was, although now that I do know I shall never forgive myself. But if you had the heart of a man you might have seen that you were subjecting me to torture. I did not ask

or expect that you should care for me, but I had a right to hope for a little kindness, a little manly and delicate consideration, a little healing sympathy for the almost mortal wound that you have made. But I now see that you have stood by and watched like a grand inquisitor. Tell your friend that you have transferred the thoughtless girl into a suffering woman. I cannot go to Brazil. I cannot face dangers that might bring rest. I must keep my place in society—keep it too under a hundred observant and curious eyes. You have seen it all of late in this house ; I was too wretched to care. It was a part of my punishment, and I accepted it. I would not be false again even in trying to conceal a secret which it is like death to a woman to reveal. I only craved one word of kindness from you. Had I received it I would have gone away in silence and suffered in silence. But your course and what I have heard have made me reckless and despairing. You do not leave me even the poor consolation of self-sacrifice. You are my stony-hearted fate. I wish you had left me to drown. Tell your friend that I am more

wretched than he ever can be, because I am a woman. Will he be satisfied?"

"He ought to be," was the low, husky reply.

"Are you proud of your triumph?"

"No, I am heartily ashamed of it; but I have kept a pledge that will probably cost me far more than it has you."

"A pledge?"

"Yes, my pledge to make you suffer as far as possible as he suffered."

She put her hand to her side as if she had received a wound, and after a moment said wearily and coldly:

"Well, tell him that you succeeded, and be content," and she turned to leave him.

"Stay," he cried impetuously. "It is now your turn. Take your revenge."

"My revenge?" she repeated in unfeigned astonishment.

'Yes, your revenge. I have loved you from the moment I hoped you had a woman's heart, yes and before—when I feared I might not be able to save your life. I know it now, though the very thought of it enraged me then. I

have watched and waited more to be sure that you had a woman's heart than for aught else, though a false sense of honor kept me true to my pledge. After I met you on the beach I determined at once to break my odious bond and place myself at your mercy. You may refuse me in view of my course—you probably will; but every one in that house there shall know that you refused me, and your triumph shall be more complete than mine."

She looked into his face with an expression of amazement and doubt, but instead of coldness, there was now a devotion and pleading that she had never seen before.

She was too confused and astounded, however, to comprehend his words immediately, nor could the impression of his hostility toward her pass away readily.

"You are mocking me," she faltered, scarcely knowing what she said.

"I cannot blame you that you think me capable of mocking the noble candor which has cost you so dear, as I can now understand. I cannot ask you to believe that I appreciate your heroic impulse of self-sacrifice—your pur-

pose to atone for wrong by inflicting irreparable wrong on yourself. It is natural that you should think of me only as an instrument of revenge with no more feeling than some keen edged weapon would have. This also is the inevitable penalty of my course. When I speak of my love I cannot complain if you smile in bitter incredulity. But I have at least proved that I have a resolute will and that I keep my word, and I again assure you that it shall be known this very night that you have refused me, that I offered you my hand, that you already had my heart where your image is enshrined with that of my mother, and that I entreated you to be my wife. My cousin alone guessed my miserable triumph ; all shall know of yours."

As he spoke with impassioned earnestness the confusion passed from her mind, she felt the truth of his words, she knew that her ambitious dream had been fulfilled, and that she had achieved the conquest of a man upon whom all others had smiled in vain. But how immeasurably different were her emotions from those which she had once anticipated ; not her

beauty, not her consummate skill in fascination had wrought this miracle, but her woman's heart, awakened at last; and it had thrilled with such an unspeakable joy that she had turned away to hide its reflex in her face. He was misled by the act into believing that she could not forgive him, and yet was perplexed when she murmured with a return of her old piquant humor,

"You are mistaken, Mr. Ackland; it shall never be known that I refused you."

"How can you prevent it?"

"If your words are sincere, you will submit to such terms as I choose to make."

"I am sincere, and my actions shall prove it, but I shall permit no mistaken self-sacrifice on your part, nor any attempt to shield me from the punishment I well deserve."

She suddenly turned upon him a radiant face in which he read his happiness, and faltered:

"Jack, I do believe you, although the change seems wrought by some heavenly magic. But it will take a long time to pay you up. I hope to be your dear torment for a life-time."

He caught her in such a strong, impetuous embrace that she gasped:

"I thought you were — cold toward our sex."

"It's not your sex that I am clasping, but you—*you*, my Eve. Like the first man, I have won my bride under the green trees and beneath the open sky."

"Yes, Jack, and I give you my whole heart as truly as did the first woman when there was but one man in all the world. That is *my revenge*."

This is what Will Munson wrote some weeks later:

"Well, Jack, I've had the yellow fever, and it was the most fortunate event of my life. I was staying with a charming family, and they would not permit my removal to a hospital. One of my bravest and most devoted nurses has consented to become my wife. I hope you punished that little wretch Eva Van Tyne as she deserved."

"Confound your fickle soul!" muttered Ackland. "I punished her as she did not deserve, and I risked more than life in doing so. If her heart had not been as good as gold and

as kind as Heaven she never would have looked at me again."

Ackland is quite as indifferent to the sex as ever, but Eva has never complained that he was cold toward her.

CHRISTMAS EVE IN WAR TIMES.

II.

Christmas Eve in War Times.

It was the beginning of a battle. The skirmish line of the Union advance was sweeping rapidly over a rough mountainous region in the South, and in his place on the extreme left of this line was Private Anson Marlow. Tall trees rising from underbrush, rocks, boulders, gulches worn by spring torrents, were the characteristics of the field, which was in wild contrast with the parade-grounds on which the combatants had first learned the tactics of war. The majority, however, of those now in the ranks had since been drilled too often under like circumstances, and with lead and iron-shotted guns, not to know their duty, and the lines of battle were as regular as the broken country allowed. So far as many obstacles permitted

Marlow kept his proper distance from the others on the line and fired coolly when he caught glimpses of the retreating Confederate skirmishers. They were retiring with ominous readiness toward a wooded height which the enemy occupied with a force of unknown strength. That strength was soon manifested in temporary disaster to the Union forces, which were driven back with heavy loss.

Neither the battle nor its fortunes are the objects of our present concern, but rather the fate of Private Marlow. The tide of battle drifted away and left the soldier desperately wounded, in a narrow ravine, through which babbled a small stream. Excepting the voices of his wife and children, no music had ever sounded so sweetly in his ears. With great difficulty he crawled to a little bubbling pool formed by a tiny cascade and encircling stones, and partially slaked his intolerable thirst.

He believed he was dying—bleeding to death. The very thought blunted his faculties for a time, and he was conscious of little beyond a dull wonder. Could it be possible that the tragedy of his death was enacting in

that peaceful, secluded nook? Could nature be so indifferent or so unconscious, if it were true that he was soon to lie there *dead?* He saw the speckled trout lying motionless at the bottom of the pool, the gray squirrels sporting in the boughs over his head. The sunlight shimmered and glinted through the leaves, flecking with light his prostrate form. He dipped his hand in the blood that had welled from his side and it fell in rubies from his fingers. Could that be his blood—his life-blood, and would it soon all ooze away? Could it be that death was coming through all the brightness of that summer afternoon?

From a shadowed tree farther up the glen, a wood-thrush suddenly began its almost unrivalled song. The familiar melody, heard so often from his cottage-porch in the June twilight, awoke him to the bitter truth. His wife had then sat beside him, while his little ones played here and there among the trees and shrubbery. They would hear the same song to-day; he would never hear it again. That counted for little, but the thought of their sitting behind the vines and listening to their

favorite bird, spring after spring and summer after summer, and he ever absent, overwhelmed him.

"O Gertrude, my wife, my wife! O my children!" he groaned.

His breast heaved with a great sigh; the blood welled afresh from his wound; what seemed a mortal weakness crept over him, and he thought he died.

* * * * * * *

"Say, Eb, is he done gone?"

"'Clar to grashus if I know. 'Pears mighty like it."

These words were spoken by two stout negroes, who had stolen toward the battle-field as the sounds of conflict died away.

"I'm doggoned if I tink he's dead. He's only swoonded," asserted the man addressed as Eb. "'Twon't do to lebe 'im here to die, Zack."

"Sartin not; we'd hab bad luck all our days."

"I reckon ole man Pearson will keep him, and his wife's a po'ful nuss."

"Pearson orter; he's a Unioner."

"S'pose we try him; 'tain't so bery fur off."

* * * * * * *

On the morning of the 24th of December, Mrs. Anson Marlow sat in the living-room of her cottage, that stood well out in the suburbs of a Northern town. Her eyes were hollow and full of trouble that seemed almost beyond tears, and the bare room, that had been stripped of nearly every appliance and suggestion of comfort, but too plainly indicated one of the causes. Want was stamped on her thin face, that once had been so full and pretty: poverty in its bitter extremity was unmistakably shown by the uncarpeted floor, the meagre fire and scanty furniture. It was a period of depression; work had been scarce, and much of the time she had been too ill and feeble to do more than care for her children. Away back in August her resources had been running low, but she had daily expected the long arrears of pay which her husband would receive as soon as the exigencies of the campaign permitted. Instead of these funds, so greatly needed, came the tidings of a Union defeat,

with her husband's name down among the missing. Beyond that brief mention, so horrible in its vagueness, she had never heard a word from the one who not only sustained her home but also her heart. Was he languishing in a Southern prison, or, mortally wounded, had he lingered out some terrible hours on that wild battle-field, a brief description of which had been so dwelt upon by her morbid fancy that it had become like one of the scenes in Dante's "Inferno"? For a long time she could not and would not believe that such an overwhelming disaster had befallen her and her children, although she knew that similar losses had come to thousands of others. Events that the world regards as not only possible but probable are often so terrible in their personal consequences that we shrink from even the bare thought of their occurrence.

If Mrs. Marlow had been told from the first that her husband was dead, the shock resulting would not have been so injurious as the suspense that robbed her of rest for days, weeks and months. She haunted the post-office, and if a stranger was seen coming up the street

toward her cottage she watched feverishly for his turning in at her gate with the tidings of her husband's safety. Night after night she lay awake, hoping, praying that she might hear his step returning on a furlough to which wounds or sickness had entitled him. The natural and inevitable result was illness and nervous prostration.

Practical neighbors had told her that her course was all wrong; that she should be resigned and even cheerful for her children's sake; that she needed to sleep well and live well in order that she might have strength to provide for them. She would make pathetic attempts to follow this sound and thrifty advice, but suddenly, when at her work or in her troubled sleep, that awful word "missing" would pierce her heart like an arrow, and she would moan and at times, in the depths of her anguish, cry out, "Oh, where is he? Shall I ever see him again?"

But the unrelenting demands of life are made as surely upon the breaking as upon the happy heart. She and her children must have food, clothing and shelter. Her illness and

feebleness at last taught her that she must not yield to her grief, except so far as she was unable to suppress it ; that, for the sake of those now seemingly dependent upon her, she must rally every shattered nerve and every relaxed muscle. With a heroism far beyond that of her husband and his comrades in the field, she sought to fight the wolf from the door, or at least to keep him at bay. Although the struggle seemed a hopeless one, she patiently did her best from day to day, eking out her scanty earnings by the sale or pawn of such of her household goods as she could best spare. She felt that she would do anything rather than reveal her poverty or accept charity. Some help was more or less kindly offered, but beyond such aid as one neighbor may receive of another she had said gently but firmly, "Not yet."

The Marlows were comparative strangers in the city where they had resided. Her husband had been a teacher in one of its public schools and his salary small. Patriotism had been his motive for entering the army, and, while it had cost him a mighty struggle to leave his family,

he felt that he had no more reason to hold back than thousands of others. He believed that he could still provide for those dependent upon him, and if he fell, those for whom he died would not permit his widow and children to suffer. But the first popular enthusiasm for the war had largely died out ; the city was full of widows and orphans ; there was depression of spirit, stagnation in business, and a very general disposition on the part of those who had means, to take care of themselves, and provide for darker days that might be in the immediate future. Sensitive, retiring Mrs. Marlow was not the one to push her claims or reveal her need. Moreover, she could never give up the hope that tidings from her husband might, at any time, bring relief and safety.

But the crisis had come at last, and on this dreary December day she was face to face with absolute want. The wolf, with his gaunt eyes, was crouched beside her cold hearth. A pittance owed to her for work had not been paid ; the little food left in the house had furnished the children an unsatisfying breakfast ; she had eaten nothing. On the table beside her

lay a note from the agent of the estate of which her home was a part, bidding her call that morning. She knew why—the rent was two months in arrears. It seemed like death to leave the house in which her husband had placed her and wherein she had spent her happiest days. It stood well away from the crowded town. The little yard and garden, with their trees, vines and shrubbery, some of which her husband had planted, were all dear from association. In the rear there was a grove and open fields, which, though not belonging to the cottage, were not forbidden to the children, and they formed a wonderland of delight in spring, summer and fall. Must she take her active, restless boy Jamie, the image of his father, into a crowded tenement? Must golden-haired Susie, with her dower of beauty, be imprisoned in one close room, or else be exposed to the evil of corrupt association just beyond the threshold?

Moreover, her retired home had become a refuge. Here she could hide her sorrow and poverty. Here she could touch what he had touched and sit, during the long winter even-

ings, in his favorite corner by the fire. Around her, within and without, were the little appliances for her comfort which his hands had made. How could she leave all this and live? Deep in her heart also the hope would linger that he would come again and seek her where he had left her.

"O God!" she cried suddenly. "Thou wouldst not, couldst not, permit him to die without one farewell word," and she buried her face in her hands and rocked back and forth, while hard, dry sobs shook her slight, famine-pinched form.

The children stopped their play and came and leaned upon her lap.

"Don't cry, mother," said Jamie, a little boy of ten; "I'll soon be big enough to work for you, and I'll get rich, and you shall have the biggest house in town. I'll take care of you if papa don't come back."

Little Sue knew not what to say, but the impulse of her love was her best guide. She threw her arms around her mother's neck with such an impetuous and child-like outburst of affection that the poor woman's bitter and

despairing thoughts were banished for a time. The deepest chord of her nature, mother love, was touched, and for her children's sake she rose up once more and faced the hard problems of her life. Putting on her bonnet and thin shawl (she had parted with much that she now so sorely needed), she went out into the cold December wind. The sky was clouded like her hopes, and the light, even in the morning hours, was dim and leaden-hued.

She first called on Mr. Jackson, the agent from whom she rented her home, and besought him to give her a little more time.

"I will beg for work from door to door," she said. "Surely in this Christian city there must be those who will give me work, and that is all I ask."

The sleek, comfortable man, in his well-appointed office, was touched slightly, and said in a voice that was not so gruff as he at first had intended it should be :

"Well, I will wait a week or two longer. If then you cannot pay something on what is already due, my duty to my employers will compel me to take the usual course. You

have told me all along that your husband would surely return, and I have hated to say a word to discourage you ; but I fear you will have to bring yourself to face the truth and act accordingly, as so many others have done. I know it's very hard for you, but I am held responsible by my employer, and at my intercession he has been lenient, as you must admit. You could get a room or two in town for half what you must pay where you are. Good-morning."

She went out again into the street, which the shrouded sky made sombre in spite of preparations seen on every side for the chief festival of the year. The fear was growing strong that like Him, in whose memory the day was honored, she and her little ones might soon not know where to lay their heads. She succeeded in getting the small sum owed to her and payment also for some sewing just finished. More work she could not readily obtain, for every one was busy and preoccupied by the coming day of gladness.

" Call again," some said kindly or carelessly, according to their nature. " After the holi-

days are over we will try to have or make some work for you."

"But I need—I must have work now," she ventured to say whenever she had the chance.

In response to this appeal there were a few offers of charity, small indeed, but from which she drew back with an instinct so strong that it could not be overcome. On every side she heard the same story. The times were very hard; requests for work and aid had been so frequent that purses and patience were exhausted. Moreover, people had spent their Christmas money on their own households and friends, and were already beginning to feel poor.

At last she obtained a little work, and having made a few purchases of that which was absolutely essential, she was about to drag her weary feet homeward when the thought occurred to her that the children would want to hang up their stockings at night, and she murmured, "It may be the last chance I shall ever have to put a Christmas gift in them. Oh, that I were stronger! Oh, that I could take my sorrow more as others seem to take theirs! But

I cannot, I cannot. My burden is greater than I can bear. The cold of this awful day is chilling my very heart, and my grief, as hope dies, is crushing my soul. Oh, he must be dead, he must be dead! That is what they all think. God help my little ones! Oh, what will become of them if I sink, as I fear I shall! If it were not for them I feel as if I would fall and die here in the street. Well, be our fate what it may, they shall owe to me one more gleam of happiness," and she went into a confectioner's shop and bought a few ornamented cakes. These were the only gifts she could afford, and they must be in the form of food.

Before she reached home the snow was whirling in the frosty air, and the shadows of the brief winter day deepening fast. With a smile far more pathetic than tears she greeted the children, who were cold, hungry and frightened at her long absence; and they, children-like, saw only the smile, and not the grief it masked. They saw also the basket which she placed on the table, and were quick to note that it seemed a little fuller than of late.

"Jamie," she said, "run to the store down the street for some coal and kindlings that I bought, and then we will have a good fire and a nice supper," and the boy, at such a prospect, eagerly obeyed.

She was glad to have him gone, that she might hide her weakness. She sank into a chair, so white and faint that even little Susie left off peering into the basket, and came to her with a troubled face.

"It's nothing, dearie," the poor creature said. "Mamma's only a little tired. See," she added, tottering to the table, "I have brought you a great piece of gingerbread."

The hungry child grasped it, and was oblivious and happy.

By the time Jamie returned with his first basket of kindling and coal, the mother had so far rallied from her exhaustion as to meet him smilingly again and help him replenish the dying fire.

"Now you shall rest and have your gingerbread before going for your second load," she said cheerily, and the boy took what was ambrosia to him and danced around the room in

joyous reaction from the depression of the long, weary day, during which, lonely and hungry, he had wondered why his mother did not return.

"So little could make them happy, and yet I cannot seem to obtain even that little," she sighed. "I fear—indeed, I fear—I cannot be with them another Christmas; therefore they shall remember that I tried to make them happy once more, and the recollection may survive the long, sad days before them, and become a part of my memory."

The room was now growing dark, and she lighted the lamp. Then she cowered shiveringly over the reviving fire, feeling as if she could never be warm again.

The street-lamps were lighted early on that clouded, stormy evening, and they were a signal to Mr. Jackson, the agent, to leave his office. He remembered that he had ordered a holiday dinner, and now found himself in a mood to enjoy it. He had scarcely left his door before a man, coming up the street with great strides and head bent down to the snow-laden blast, brushed roughly against

him. The stranger's cap was drawn over his eyes, and the raised collar of his blue army overcoat nearly concealed his face. The man hurriedly begged pardon, and was hastening on when Mr. Jackson's exclamation of surprise cause him to stop and look at the person he had jostled.

"Why, Mr. Marlow," the agent began, "I'm glad to see you. It's a pleasure I feared I should never have again."

"My wife," the man almost gasped, "she's still in the house I rented of you?"

"Oh, certainly," was the hasty reply. "It'll be all right now."

"What do you mean? Has it not been all right?"

"Well, you see," said Mr. Jackson apologetically, "we have been very lenient toward your wife, but the rent has not been paid for over two months, and—"

"And you were about to turn her and her children out of doors in midwinter," broke in the soldier wrathfully. "That is the way you sleek, comfortable stay-at-home people care for those fighting your battles. After you con-

cluded that I was dead, and that the rent might not be forthcoming, you decided to put my wife into the street. Open your office, sir, and you shall have your rent."

"Now, Mr. Marlow, there's no cause for pitching into me in this way. You know that I am but an agent, and—"

"Tell your rich employer, then, what I have said, and ask him what he would be worth to-day were there not men like myself, who are willing to risk everything and suffer everything for the Union. But I've no time to bandy words. Have you seen my wife lately?"

"Yes," was the hesitating reply; "she was here to-day, and I—"

"How is she? What did you say to her?"

"Well, she doesn't look very strong. I felt sorry for her and gave her more time, taking the responsibility myself—"

"How much time?"

"I said two weeks, but no doubt I could have had the time extended."

"I have *my* doubts. Will you and your employer please accept my humble gratitude that you had the grace not to turn her out of

doors during the holiday season. It might have caused remark, but that consideration and some others that I might name are not to be weighed against a few dollars and cents. I shall now remove the strain upon your patriotism at once, and will not only pay arrears but also for two months in advance."

"Oh, there's no need of that to-day."

"Yes, there is. My wife shall feel to-night that she has a home She evidently has not received the letter I wrote as soon as I reached our lines, or you would not have been talking to her about two weeks more of shelter."

The agent reopened his office and saw a roll of bills extracted from Marlow's pocket that left no doubt of the soldier's ability to provide for his family. He gave his receipt in silence, feeling that words would not mend matters, and then trudged off to his dinner with a flagging appetite.

As Marlow strode away he came to a sudden resolution—he would look upon his wife and children before they saw him ; he would feast his eyes while they were unconscious of the love that was beaming upon them. The dark-

ness and storm favored his project, and in brief time he saw the light in his window. Unlatching the gate softly and with his steps muffled by the snow that already carpeted the frozen ground, he reached the window, the blinds of which were but partially closed. His children frolicking about the room were the first objects that caught his eye, and he almost laughed aloud in his joy. Then, by turning another blind slightly, he saw his wife shivering over the fire.

"Great God!" he muttered, "how she has suffered!" and he was about to rush in and take her into his arms. On the threshold he restrained himself, paused and said, "No, not yet; I'll break the news of my return in my own way. The shock of my sudden appearance might be too great for her;" and he went back to the window. The wife's eyes were following her children with such a wistful tenderness that the boy, catching her gaze, stopped his sport, came to her side and began to speak. They were but a few feet away, and Marlow caught every word.

"Mamma," the child said, "you didn't eat

any breakfast, and I don't believe you have eaten anything to-day. You are always giving everything to us. Now I declare I won't eat another bit unless you take half of my cake," and he broke off a piece and laid it in her lap.

"Oh, Jamie," cried the poor woman, "you looked so like your father when you spoke that I could almost see him," and she caught him in her arms and covered him with kisses.

"I'll soon be big enough to take care of you. I'm going to grow up just like papa and do everything for you," the boy said proudly as she released him.

Little Susie also came and placed what was left of her cake in her mother's lap, saying:

"I'll work for you, too, mamma, and to-morrow I'll sell the doll Santa Claus gave me last Christmas, and then we'll all have plenty to eat."

Anson Marlow was sobbing outside the window as only a man weeps, and his tears in the bitter cold became drops of ice before they reached the ground.

"My darlings!" the mother cried. "O God, spare me to you and provide some way

for us. Your love should make me rich though I lack all else. There, I won't cry any more, and you shall have as happy a Christmas as I can give you. Perhaps He who knew what it was to be homeless and shelterless will provide for our need; so we'll try to trust Him and keep His birthday. And now, Jamie, go and bring the rest of the coal, and then we will make the dear home that papa gave us cheery and warm once more. If he were only with us we wouldn't mind hunger or cold, would we? O my husband!" she broke out afresh, "if you could only come back, even though crippled and helpless, I feel that I could live and grow strong from simple gladness."

"Don't you think, mamma," Jamie asked, "that God will let papa come down from heaven and spend Christmas with us? He might be here like the angels, and we not see him."

"I'm afraid not," the sad woman replied, shaking her head and speaking more to herself than to the child. "I don't see how he could go back to heaven and be happy if he knew all. No, we must be patient and try to do

our best, so that we can go to him. Go now, Jamie, before it gets too late. I'll get supper, and then we'll sing a Christmas hymn, and you and Susie shall hang up your stockings, just as you did last Christmas, when dear papa was with us. We'll try to do everything he would wish, and then by-and-by we shall see him again."

As the boy started on his errand his father stepped back out of the light of the window, then followed the child with a great yearning in his heart. He would make sure the boy was safe at home again before he carried out his plan. From a distance he saw the little fellow receive the coal and start slowly homeward with the burden, and he followed to a point where the light of the street lamps ceased, then joined the child, and said in a gruff voice, "Here, little man, I'm going your way. Let me carry your basket," and he took it and strode on so fast that the boy had to run to keep pace with him. Jamie shuffled along through the snow as well as he could, but his little legs were so short in comparison with those of the kindly stranger that he found him-

self gradually falling behind. So he put on an extra burst of speed and managed to lay hold of the long blue skirt of the army overcoat.

"Please, sir, don't go quite so fast," he panted.

The stranger slackened his pace, and in a constrained tone of voice, asked :

"How far are you going, little man ?"

"Only to our house—mamma's. She's Mrs. Marlow, you know."

"Yes, I know—that is, I reckon I do. How much farther is it ?"

"Oh, not much ; we're most half-way now. I say, you're a soldier, aren't you ?"

"Yes, my boy," said Marlow, with a lump in his throat. "Why ?"

"Well, you see, my papa is a soldier, too, and I thought you might know him. We haven't heard from him for a good while, and—" choking a bit—"mamma's afraid he is hurt, or taken prisoner or something." He could not bring himself to say "killed."

Jamie let go the overcoat to draw his sleeve across his eyes, and the big man once more strode on faster than ever, and Jamie began to

fear lest the dusky form might disappear in the snow and darkness with both basket and coal, but the apparent stranger so far forgot his part that he put down the basket at Mrs. Marlow's gate, and then passed on so quickly that the panting boy had not time to thank him. Indeed, Anson Marlow knew that if he lingered but a moment he would have the child in his arms.

"Why, Jamie," exclaimed his mother, "how could you get back so soon with that heavy basket? It was too heavy for you, but you will have to be mamma's little man now."

"A big man caught up with me and carried it. I don't care if he did have a gruff voice, I'm sure he was a good, kind man. He knew where we lived, too, for he put the basket down at our gate before I could say a word, I was so out of breath, and then he was out of sight in a minute." Some instinct kept him from saying anything about the army overcoat.

"It's some neighbor that lives farther up the street, I suppose, and saw you getting the coal at the store," Mrs. Marlow said. "Yes, Jamie, it was a good, kind act to help a little

boy, and I think he'll have a happier Christmas for doing it."

"Do you really think he'll have a happier Christmas, mamma?"

"Yes, I truly think so. We are so made that we cannot do a kind act without feeling the better for it."

"Well, I think he was a queer sort of a man if he was kind. I never knew any one to walk so fast. I spoke to him once, but he did not answer. Perhaps the wind roared so he couldn't hear me."

"No doubt he was hurrying home to his wife and children," she said, with a deep sigh.

When his boy disappeared within the door of the cottage, Marlow turned and walked rapidly toward the city, first going to the grocery at which he had been in the habit of purchasing his supplies. The merchant stared for a moment, then stepped forward and greeted his customer warmly.

"Well," he said, after his first exclamations of surprise were over, "the snow has made you almost as white as a ghost, but I'm glad

you're not one. We scarce ever thought to see you again."

"Has my wife an open account here now?" was the brief response.

"Yes, and it might have been much larger. I've told her so, too. She stopped taking credit some time ago, and when she's had a dollar or two to spare she's paid it on the old score. She bought so little that I said to her once that she need not go elsewhere to buy—that I'd sell to her as cheap as any one; that I believed you'd come back all right, and if you didn't she could pay me when she could. What do you think she did? Why she burst out crying, and said, 'God bless you, sir, for saying my husband will come back. So many have discouraged me.' I declare to you her feeling was so right down genuine that I had to mop my own eyes. But she wouldn't take any more credit, and she bought so little that I've been troubled. I'd have sent her something, but your wife somehow ain't one of them kind that you can give things to, and—"

Marlow interrupted the good-hearted, garrulous shopman by saying significantly, "Come

with me to your back-office ;" for the soldier feared that some one might enter who would recognize him and carry the tidings to his home prematurely.

" Mr. Wilkins," he said rapidly, " I wanted to find out if you, too, had thriftily shut down on a soldier's wife. You shall not regret your kindness."

" Hang it all," broke in Wilkins with compunction, " I haven't been very kind. I ought to have gone and seen your wife and found out how things were, and I meant to, but I've been so confoundedly busy—"

" No matter now, I've not a moment to spare. You must help me to break the news of my return in my own way. I mean they shall have such a Christmas in the little cottage as was never known in this town. You could send a load right over there, couldn't you ?"

" Certainly, certainly," said Wilkins, under the impulse of both business thrift and goodwill, and a list of tea, coffee, sugar, flour, bread, cakes, apples, etc., was dashed off rapidly ; and Marlow had the satisfaction of seeing the errand-boy, the two clerks and the proprietor

himself busily working to fill the order in the shortest possible space of time.

He next went to a restaurant, a little farther down the street, where he had taken his meals for a short time before he brought his family to town, and was greeted with almost equal surprise and warmth. Marlow cut short all words by his almost feverish haste. A huge turkey had just been roasted for the needs of the coming holiday, and this with a cold ham and a pot of coffee was ordered to be sent in a covered tray within a quarter of an hour. Then a toy-shop was visited, and such a doll purchased! for tears came into Marlow's eyes whenever he thought of his child's offer to sell her dolly for her mother's sake.

After selecting a sled for Jamie, and directing that they should be sent at once, he could restrain his impatience no longer, and almost tore back to his station at the cottage window. His wife was placing the meagre little supper on the table, and how poor and scanty it was!

"Is that the best the dear soul can do on Christmas eve?" he groaned. "Why, there's scarcely enough for little Sue. Thank God,

thy darling, I will sit down with you to a rather different supper before long."

He bowed his head reverently with his wife as she asked God's blessing, and wondered at her faith. Then he looked and listened again with a heart-hunger which had been growing for months.

"Do you really think Santa Claus will fill our stockings to-night?" Sue asked.

"I think he'll have something for you," she replied. "There are so many poor little boys and girls in the city that he may not be able to bring very much to you."

"Who is Santa Claus, anyway?" questioned Jamie.

Tears came into the wife's eyes as she thought of the one who had always remembered them so kindly as far as his modest means permitted.

She hesitated in her reply, and before she could decide upon an answer there was a knock at the door. Jamie ran to open it, and started back as a man entered with cap, eyebrows, beard and shaggy coat all white with the falling snow. He placed two great baskets of

provisions on the floor, and said they were for Mrs. Anson Marlow.

"There is some mistake," Mrs. Marlow began, but the children, after staring a moment, shouted, "Santa Claus! Santa Claus!"

The grocer's man took the unexpected cue instantly, and said, "No mistake, ma'am. They are from Santa Claus;" and before another word could be spoken he was gone. The face of the grocer's man was not very familiar to Mrs. Marlow, and the snow had disguised him completely. The children had no misgivings, and pounced upon the baskets, and, with exclamations of delight, drew out such articles as they could lift.

"I can't understand it," said the mother, bewildered and almost frightened.

"Why, mamma, it's as plain as day," cried Jamie. "Didn't he look just like the pictures of Santa Claus—white beard and white eyebrows? Oh, mamma, mamma, here is a great paper of red-cheeked apples;" and he and Susie tugged at it until they dragged it over the side of the basket, when the bottom of the bag came out, and the fruit flecked the floor

with red and gold. Oh, the bliss of picking up those apples ; of comparing one with another —of running to the mother and asking which was the biggest and which the reddest and most beautifully streaked !

" There must have been some mistake," the poor woman kept murmuring as she examined the baskets and found how liberal and varied was the supply, " for who could or would have been so kind ?"

" Why, mommie," said little Sue, reproachfully, " Santa Claus brought 'em. Haven't you always told us that Santa Claus liked to make us happy ?"

The long-exiled father felt that he could restrain himself but a few moments longer, and he was glad to see that the rest of his purchases were at the door. With a look so intent, and yearning concentration of thought so intense, that it was strange that they could not feel his presence, he bent his eyes once more upon a scene that would imprint itself upon his memory forever.

But while he stood there another scene came before his mental vision. Oddly enough his

thought went back to that far-off Southern brookside, where he had lain with his hands in the cool water. He leaned against the window-casing, with the Northern snow whirling about his head, but he breathed the balmy breath of a Southern forest, the wood-thrush sang in the trees overhead, and he could—so it seemed to him—actually feel the water-worn pebbles under his palms as he watched the life-blood ebbing from his side. Then there was a dim consciousness of rough but kindly arms bearing him through the underbrush, and, more distinctly, the memory of weary weeks of convalescence in a mountaineer's cabin. All these scenes of peril, before he finally reached the Union lines, passed before him as he stood in a species of trance beside the window of his home.

The half-grown boys sent from the restaurant and toy-shop could not be mistaken for Santa Claus even by the credulous fancy of the children, and Mrs. Marlow stepped forward eagerly, and said :

" I am sure there is some mistake. You are certainly leaving these articles at the wrong

house." The faces of the children began to grow anxious and troubled also, for even their faith could not accept such marvellous good fortune. Jamie looked at the sled with a kind of awe, and saw at a glance that it was handsomer than any in the street. "Mr. Lansing, a wealthy man, lives a little farther on," Mrs. Marlow began to urge, "and these things must be meant—"

"Isn't your name Mrs. Anson Marlow?" asked the boy from the restaurant.

"Yes."

"Then I must do as I've been told;" and he opened his tray and placed the turkey, the ham and the coffee on the table.

"If he's right, I'm right, too," said he of the toy-shop. "Them was my directions;" and they were both about to depart when the woman sprang forward and gasped:

"Stay!"

She clasped her hands and trembled violently.

"Who sent these things?" she faltered.

"Our bosses, mum," replied the boy from the restaurant, hesitatingly.

She sprang toward him, seized his arm, and

looked imploringly into his face. "Who ordered them sent?" she asked, in a low, passionate voice.

The young fellow began to smile, and stammered awkwardly, "I don't think I'm to tell."

She released his arm, and glanced around with a look of intense expectation.

"Oh, oh!" she gasped, with quick, short sobs, "can it be—" Then she sprang to the door, opened it, and looked out into the black, stormy night. What seemed a shadow rushed toward her, she felt herself falling, but strong arms caught and bore her, half fainting, to a lounge within the room.

Many have died from sorrow, but few from joy. With her husband's arms around her Mrs. Marlow's weakness soon passed. In response to his deep, earnest tones of soothing and entreaty, she speedily opened her eyes and gave him a smile so full of content and unutterable joy that all anxiety in her behalf began to pass from his mind.

"Yes," she said softly, "I can live now. It seems as if a new and stronger life were coming back with every breath."

The young fellows who had been the bearers of the gifts were so touched that they drew their rough sleeves across their eyes as they hastened away, closing the door on the happiest family in the city.

THREE THANKSGIVING KISSES.

III.

THREE THANKSGIVING KISSES.

It was the day before Thanksgiving. The brief, cloudy November afternoon was fast merging into early twilight. The trees, now gaunt and bare, creaked and groaned in the passing gale, and clashed their icy branches together with sounds sadly unlike the slumberous rustle of their foliage in June. And that same foliage is now flying before the wind, swept hither and thither, like exiles driven by disaster from the moorings of home ; at times finding a brief abiding-place, and then carried forward to parts unknown by circumstances beyond control. The street leading into the village is almost deserted, and the few who come and go hasten on with fluttering garments, head bent down, and a shivering sense

of discomfort. The fields are bare and brown, and the landscape on the uplands rising in the distance would be utterly sombre did not green fields of grain, as childlike faith in wintry age, relieve the gloomy outlook and prophecy of the sunshine and golden harvest of a new year and life.

But bleak November found no admittance in Mrs. Alford's cosey parlor. Though, as usual, it was kept as the room for state occasions, it was not a stately room. It was furnished with elegance and good taste ; but, what was better, the genial home atmosphere from the rest of the house had invaded it, and one did not feel, on entering it from the free-and-easy sitting-room, as if passing from a sunny climate to the icebergs of the Pole. Therefore I am sure my reader will follow me gladly out of the biting, boisterous wind into the homelike apartment ; and, as we stand in fancy before the glowing grate, we will make the acquaintance of the May-day creature who is its sole occupant.

Elsie Alford, just turning seventeen, appears younger than her years warranted. Some

girls carry the child far into their teens, and blend the mirthful innocence of infancy with the richer, fuller life of budding womanhood. This was true of Elsie. Hers was not the forced exotic bloom of fashionable life; but she was like one of the native blossoms of her New England home, having all the delicacy and at the same time hardiness of the wind-flower. She was also as shy and easily agitated; and yet, like the flower she resembled, well rooted among the rocks of principle and truth. She was the youngest and the pet of the household, and yet the "petting" was not of that kind that develops selfishness and wilfulness; but, rather, a genial sunlight of love falling upon her as a focus from the entire family. They always spoke of her as "Little Sis," or the "child." And a child it seemed she would ever be, with her kittenish ways, quick impulses, and swiftly alternating moods. As she developed into womanly proportions, her grave, business-like father began to have misgivings. After one of her wild sallies at the table, where she kept every one on the *qui vive* by her unrestrained chatter, Mr. Alford said:

"Elsie, will you ever learn to be a woman?"

Looking mischievously at him through her curls, she replied: "Yes; I might if I became as old as Mrs. Methusaleh."

They finally concluded to leave Elsie's cure to care and trouble—two certain elements of earthly life; and yet her experience of either would be slight, indeed, could their love have shielded her.

But it would not be exactly care or trouble that would sober Elsie into a thoughtful woman, as our story will show.

Some of the November wind seemed in her curling hair upon this fateful day; but her fresh young April face was a pleasant contrast to the scene presented from the window, to which she kept flitting with increasing frequency. It certainly was not the dismal and darkening landscape that so intensely interested her. The light of a great and coming pleasure is in her face, and her manner is one of restless, eager expectancy. Little wonder. Her pet brother, the one next older than herself, a promising young theologue, is coming home to spend Thanksgiving. It was time he appeared.

The shriek of the locomotive had announced the arrival of the train, and her ardent little spirit could scarcely endure the moments intervening before she would almost concentrate herself into a rapturous kiss and embrace of welcome, for the favorite brother had been absent several long months.

Her mother called her away for a few moments, for the good old lady was busy, indeed, knowing well that merely full hearts would not answer for a New England Thanksgiving. But the moment Elsie was free she darted back to the window, just in time to catch a glimpse, as she supposed, of her brother's well-remembered dark gray overcoat, as he was ascending the front steps.

A tall, grave-looking young man, an utter stranger to the place and family, had his hand upon the door-bell; but before he could ring it the door flew open, and a lovely young creature precipitated herself on his neck, like a missile fired from heavenly battlements, and a kiss was pressed upon his lips that he afterward admitted to have felt even to the "toes of his boots."

But his startled manner caused her to lift her face from under his side-whiskers ; and, though the dusk was deepening, she could see that her arms were around an utter stranger. She recoiled from him with a bound, and trembling like a wind-flower, indeed, her large blue eyes dilated at the intruder with a dismay beyond words. How the awkward scene would have ended it were hard to tell, had not the hearty voice of one coming up the path called out :

" Hi, there, you witch ! who is that you are kissing, and then standing off to see the effect ?"

There was no mistake this time ; so, impelled by love, shame, and fear of " that horrid man," she fled, half sobbing, to his arms.

" No, he isn't a ' horrid man,' either," whispered her brother, laughing. " He is a classmate of mine. Why, Stanhope, how are you ? I did not know that you and my sister were so well acquainted," he added, half banteringly and half curiously, for as yet he did not fully understand the scene.

The hall lamp, shining through the open door, had revealed the features of the young

man (whom we must now call Mr. Stanhope), so that his classmate had recognized him. His first impulse had been to slip away in the darkness, and so escape from his awkward predicament ; but George Alford's prompt address prevented this and brought him to bay. He was painfully embarrassed, but managed to stammer :

"I was taken for you, I think. I never had the pleasure — honor of meeting your sister."

"Oh, ho ! I see now. My wild little sister kissed before she looked. Well, that was your good fortune. I could keep two Thanksgiving days on the strength of such a kiss as that," cried the light-hearted student, shaking the diffident, shrinking Mr. Stanhope warmly by the hand. "You will hardly need a formal introduction now. But, bless me, where is she? Has the November wind blown her away ?"

"I think your sist—, the lady, passed around to the side entrance. I fear I have annoyed her sadly."

"Nonsense ! A good joke. Something to

tease the little witch about. But come in. I'm forgetting the sacred rites."

And, before the bewildered Mr. Stanhope could help himself, he was half dragged into the lighted hall, and the door shut between him and escape.

In the mean time, Elsie, like a whirlwind, had burst into the kitchen, where Mrs. Alford was superintending some savory dishes, exclaiming :

"Oh ! mother, George has come and has a horrid man with him, who nearly devoured me."

And, with this rather feminine mode of stating the case, she darted into the dusky, firelighted parlor, from whence, unseen, she could reconnoitre the hall. Mr. Stanhope was just saying :

"Please let me go. I have stood between you and your welcome long enough. I shall only be a marplot ; and besides, as an utter stranger, I have no right to stay." To all of which Elsie devoutly whispered to herself, "Amen."

But Mrs. Alford now appeared, and, after a

warm, motherly greeting to her son, turned in genial courtesy toward his friend, as she supposed.

George was so happy that he wished every one else to be the same. The comical episode attending Mr. Stanhope's unexpected appearance just hit his frolicsome mood, and promised to be a source of endless merriment if he could only keep his classmate over the coming holiday. Moreover, he long had wished to become better acquainted with this young man, whose manner at the seminary had deeply interested him. So he said :

"Mother, this is Mr. Stanhope, a classmate of mine. I wish you would help me persuade him to stay."

"Why, certainly, I supposed you expected to stay with us, of course," said Mrs. Alford, heartily.

Mr. Stanhope looked ready to sink through the floor, and his naturally pale face and even his neck were crimson.

"I do assure you, madam," he urged, "it is all a mistake. I am not an invited guest. I was merely calling on a little matter of busi-

ness, when—" and there he stopped. George exploded into a hearty, uncontrollable laugh; while Elsie, in the darkness, shook her little fist at the stranger, who hastened to add: "Please let me bid you good-evening. I have not the slightest claim on your hospitality."

"Where are you staying?" asked Mrs. Alford, a little mystified. "We would like you to spend at least part of the time with us."

"I do not expect to be here very long. I have a room at the hotel."

"Now, look here, Stanhope," cried George, barring all egress by planting his back against the door, "do you take me, a half-fledged theologue, for a heathen? Do you suppose that I could be such a churl as to let a classmate stay at our dingy, forlorn little tavern and eat hash on Thanksgiving Day? I could never look you in the face at recitation again. Have some consideration for my peace of mind, and I am sure you will find our home quite as endurable as anything Mr. Starks can provide."

"Oh! as to that, from even the slight

glimpse that I have had, this seems more like a home than anything I have known for many years ; but I cannot feel it right that I, an unexpected stranger—"

"Come, come! No more of that. You know what is written about 'entertaining strangers' ; so that is your strongest claim. Moreover, that text works both ways sometimes, and the stranger angel finds himself among angels. My old mother here, if she does weigh well on toward two hundred, is more like one than anything I have yet seen. And Elsie, if not an angel, is, at least, part witch and part fairy. But you need not fear ghostly entertainment from mother's larder. As you are a Christian, and not a Pagan, no more of this reluctance. Indeed, *nolens volens*, I shall not permit you to go out into this November storm to-night ;" and Elsie, to her dismay, saw him led up to the "spare room" with a sort of hospitable violence.

With flaming cheeks and eyes half full of indignant tears, she now made onslaught on her mother, who had returned to the kitchen, where she was making preparations for a sup-

per that might almost answer for the dinner the next day.

"Mother, mother," she exclaimed, "how could you keep that disagreeable stranger! He will spoil our Thanksgiving."

"Why, child, what is the matter?" said Mrs. Alford, raising her eyes in surprise to her daughter's face, that looked like a red moon through the mist of savory vapors rising from the ample cooking-stove. "I don't understand you. Why should not your brother's classmate add to the pleasure of our Thanksgiving?"

"Well, perhaps if we had expected him, if he had come in some other way, and we knew more about him—"

"Bless you, child, what a formalist you have become. You stand on a fine point of etiquette, as if it were the broad foundation of hospitality; while only last week you wanted a ragged tramp, who had every appearance of being a thief, to stay all night. Your brother thinks it a special providence that his friend should have turned up so unexpectedly."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Elsie. "If that is

what the doctrine of special providence means, I shall need a new confession of faith." Then a sudden thought occurred to her, and she vanished, while her mother smiled, saying :

"What a queer child she is, to be sure."

A moment later Elsie gave a sharp knock at the spare-room door, and then in a second she was in the farther end of the dark hall. George put his head out.

"Come here," she whispered. "Are you sure it's you?" she added, holding him off at arm's length.

His response was such a tempest of kisses and embraces that in her nervous state she was quite panic-stricken.

"George," she gasped, "have mercy on me."

"I only wished to show you how he felt, so you would have some sympathy for him."

"If you don't stop," said the almost desperate girl, "I will shut myself up and not appear till he is gone. I will any way, if you don't make me a solemn promise."

"Leave out the 'solemn.'"

"No, I won't. Upon your word and

honor, promise never to tell what has happened—my mistake, I mean."

"Oh! Elsie, it's too good to keep," laughed George.

"Now, George, if you tell," sobbed Elsie, "you'll spoil my holiday, your visit, and everything."

"If you feel that way, you foolish child, of course I won't tell. Indeed, I suppose I should not, for Stanhope seems half frightened out of his wits also."

"Serves him right; though I doubt whether he has many to lose," said Elsie, spitefully.

"Well, I will do my best to keep in," said George, soothingly, and stroking her curls. "But you will let it all out; you see. The idea of you keeping anything with your April face!"

Elsie acted upon the hint, and went to her room in order to remove all traces of agitation before the supper-bell should summon her to meet the dreaded stranger.

In the mean time, Mr. Alford and James, the second son, had come up from the village,

where they had a thriving business. They greeted George's friend so cordially that it went some way toward putting the diffident youth at his ease. But he dreaded meeting Elsie again quite as much as she did him.

"Who is this Mr. Stanhope?" his parents asked, as they drew George aside for a little private talk after his long absence.

"Well, he is a classmate with whom I have long wished to get better acquainted. But he is so shy and retiring that I have made little progress. He came from another seminary, and entered our class in this the middle year. No one seems to know much about him; and, indeed, he has shunned all intimacies and devotes himself wholly to his books. The recitation-room is the one place where he appears well; for there he speaks out, as if forgetting himself, or, rather, losing himself in some truth under contemplation. Sometimes he will ask a question that wakes up both class and professor; but at other times it seems difficult to pierce the shell of his reserve or diffidence. And yet, from little things I have seen, I know that he has a good, warm heart, and the work-

ing of his mind in the recitation-room fascinates me. Further than this I know little about him ; but have just learned, from his explanation as to his unexpected appearance at our door, that he is very poor, and purposed to spend his holiday vacation as agent for a new magazine that is offering liberal premiums. I think his poverty is one of the reasons why he has so shrank from companionship with the other students. He thinks he ought to go out and continue his efforts to-night."

"This stormy night!" ejaculated kindly Mrs. Alford. "It would be barbarous."

"Certainly it would, mother. We must not let him. But you must all be considerate, for he seems excessively diffident and sensitive ; and besides—but no matter."

"No fear but that we will soon make him at home. And it's a pleasure to entertain people who are not surfeited with attention. I don't understand Elsie, however, for she seems to have formed a violent prejudice against him. And from the nature of her announcement of his presence I gathered that he was a rather forward young man."

There was a twinkle in George's eye ; but he merely said :

" Elsie is full of moods and tenses ; but her kind little heart is always the same, and that will bring her around all right."

They were soon after marshalled to the supper-room, and Elsie slipped in among the others ; but was so stately and demure and with her curls brushed down so straight that you would scarcely have known her. Her father caught his pet around the waist, and was about to introduce her, when George hastened to say, with the solemnity of a funeral, that Elsie and Mr. Stanhope had met before.

Elsie repented the promise she had wrung from her brother, for any amount of badinage would be better than this depressing formality. She took her seat, not daring to look at the obnoxious guest ; and the family noticed with surprise that they had never seen the little maiden so quenched and abashed before. But George good-naturedly tried to make the conversation general, so as to give them time to recover themselves.

Elsie soon ventured to steal shy looks at Mr. Stanhope, and, with her usual quickness, discovered that he was more in terror of her than she of him, and she exulted in the fact.

"I'll punish him well, if I get a chance," she thought, with a certain phase of the feminine sense of justice. But the sadness of his face quite disarmed her when her mother, in well-meant kindness, asked :

"Where is your home located, Mr. Stanhope ?"

"In the seminary," he answered, in rather a low tone.

"You don't mean to say that you have no better one than a forlorn cell in Dogma Hall ?" exclaimed George, earnestly.

Mr. Stanhope crimsoned, and then grew pale, but tried to say, lightly : "An orphan of my size and years is not a very moving object of sympathy ; but one might well find it difficult not to break the Tenth Commandment while seeing how you are surrounded."

Elsie was vexed at her disposition to relent toward him ; she so hardened her face, however, that James rallied her.

"Why, Puss, what is the matter? Yours is the most unpromising Thanksgiving phiz I have seen to-day. Count your marcies."

But Elsie blushed so violently and Mr. Stanhope looked so distressed that James finished his supper in puzzled silence, thinking, however: "What has come over the little witch? For a wonder, she seems to have met a man that she is afraid of; but the joke is, he seems even more afraid of her."

In the social parlor some of the stiffness wore off; but Elsie and Mr. Stanhope kept on opposite sides of the room and had very little to say to each other. Motherly Mrs. Alford drew the young man out sufficiently, however, to become deeply interested in him.

By the next morning time for thought had led him to feel that he must trespass on their hospitality no longer. Moreover, he plainly recognized that his presence was an oppression and restraint upon Elsie, and he was very sorry that he had stayed at all. But when he made known his purpose the family would not listen to it.

"I should feel dreadfully hurt if you left us

now," said Mrs. Alford, so decidedly that he was in a dilemma, and stole a timid look toward Elsie, who at once guessed his motive in going away. Her kind heart got the better of her, and her face relented in a sudden reassuring smile. Then she turned hastily away. Only George saw and understood the little side scene ; but Mr. Stanhope was induced to remain. Then Elsie, in her quickly varying moods, was vexed at herself, and became more cold and distant than ever. "He will regard me as only a pert, forward miss ; but I will teach him better," she thought, and she astonished the family more and more by a stateliness utterly unlike herself. Mr. Stanhope sincerely regretted that he not broken away, in spite of the others ; but, in order not to seem vacillating, resolved to stay till the following morning, even though he departed burdened with the thought that he had spoiled the day for one of the family. Things had now gone so far that leaving might only lead to explanations and more general annoyances, for George had intimated that the little mistake of the previous evening should remain a secret.

And yet he sincerely wished she would relent toward him, for she could not make her sweet little face repellent, and the kiss she gave him still seemed to tingle in his very soul, while her last smile was like a ray of warmest sunshine. But her face, never designed to be severe, was averted.

After having heard the affairs of the nation discussed in a sound, scriptural manner, they all sat down to a dinner such as had never blessed poor Mr. Stanhope's vision before. A married son and daughter returned after church and half a dozen grandchildren enlivened the occasion. And there was need of them, for Elsie, usually in a state of wild effervescence upon such occasions, was now demure and comparatively silent. The children, with whom she was accustomed to romp like one of them, were perplexed indeed; and only the intense excitement of a Thanksgiving dinner diverted their minds from Aunt Elsie, so sadly changed. She was conscious that all were noting her absent manner, and this embarrassed and vexed her more; and yet she seemed under a miserable par-

alysis, that she could neither explain nor escape.

"If we had only laughed it off at first," she groaned to herself; "but now the whole thing grows more absurd and disagreeable every moment."

"Why, Elise," said her father, banteringly, "you doubted the other day whether Mrs. Methusaleh's age would ever sober you; and yet I think that good old lady would have looked more genial on Thanksgiving Day. What is the matter?"

"I was thinking of the sermon," she said.

Amid the comic elevation of eyebrows, George said, slyly:

"Tell us the text."

Overwhelmed with confusion, she darted a reproachful glance toward him, and muttered:

"I did not say anything about the text."

"Well, tell us about the sermon then," laughed James.

"No," said Elsie, sharply. "I'll quote, you a text. 'Eat, drink, and be merry,' and let me alone."

They saw that, for some reason, she could not bear teasing, and that such badinage troubled Mr. Stanhope also. But George came gallantly to the rescue, and the dinner-party grew so merry that Elsie thawed perceptibly and Stanhope was beguiled into several witty speeches. At each one Elsie opened her eyes in a wider and growing appreciation. At last, when they rose from their coffee, she came to the surprising conclusion :

"Why, he is not stupid and bad-looking after all."

George was bent on breaking the ice between them, and so proposed that the younger members of the family party should go up a swollen stream and see the fall. But Elsie flanked herself with a sister-in-law on one side and a niece on the other, and Stanhope was so diffident that nothing but downright encouragement would bring him to her side. So George was almost in despair. Elsie's eyes had been conveying favorable impressions to her reluctant mind throughout the walk, and she sincerely regretted that such an absurd barrier had grown up between them ; but could

not for the life of her, especially before others, do anything to break the awkward spell.

At last they were on their return, and were all grouped together on a little bluff, watching the water pour foamingly through a narrow gorge.

"Oh! see," cried Elsie, suddenly pointing to the opposite bank, "what beautiful moss that is over there. It is just the kind I have been wanting. Oh, dear! there isn't a bridge within half a mile."

Stanhope glanced around a moment, and then said, gallantly: "I will get you the moss, Miss Alford." And they saw that in some inconceivable way he intended crossing where they stood. The gorge was much too wide for the most vigorous leap; so Elsie exclaimed, eagerly:

"Oh! please don't take any risk. What is a little moss?"

"I say, Stanhope," remonstrated George, seriously, "it would be no laughing matter if you should fall in there."

But Stanhope only smiled, threw off his overcoat, and buttoned his undercoat closely

around him. George groaned to himself, "This will be worse than the kissing scrape," and was about to lay a restraining grasp upon his friend. But he slipped away, and lightly overhanded up a tall, slender sapling on the edge of the bank, and the whole party gathered round in breathless expectation. Having reached its slender, swaying top, he threw himself out on the land side, and it at once bent to the ground with his weight, but without snapping, showing that it was tough and fibrous. Holding firmly to the top, he gave a strong spring, which, with the spring of the bent sapling, sent him well over the gorge on the firm ground beyond.

There was a round of applause from the little group he had just left, in which Elsie joined heartily; and her eyes were glowing with admiration, for when was not power and daring captivating to a woman? Then, in sudden alarm and forgetfulness of her former coolness, she exclaimed:

"But how will you get back?"

"This is my bridge," he replied, smiling brightly across to her and holding on to the

slender young tree. "You perceive that I was brought up in the country."

And he tied the sapling down to a root with a handkerchief, and then proceeded to fill another with moss.

As George saw Elsie's face while she watched Stanhope gather the coveted trifle, he chuckled to himself :

"The ice is broken between them now."

But Stanhope had insecurely fastened the sapling down. The strain upon the knot was too severe, and suddenly the young tree flew up and stood erect but quivering, with his handkerchief fluttering in its top as a symbol of defeat. There was an exclamation of dismay, and Elsie again asked, with real anxiety in her tone :

"How will you get back now?"

Stanhope shrugged his shoulders.

"I confess I am defeated, for there is no like sapling on this side ; but I have the moss, and can join you at the bridge below, if nothing better offers."

"George," said Elsie, indignantly, "don't

go away and leave Mr. Stanhope's handkerchief in that tree."

"Bless you, child," cried George, mischievously, and leading the way down the path, "I can't climb any more than a pumpkin. You will have to go back with him after it, or let it wave as a memento of his gallantry on your behalf."

"If I can only manage to throw them together without any embarrassing third parties present the ridiculous restraint they are under will soon vanish," he thought; and so he hastened his steps, and the rest trooped after him, while Stanhope made his way with difficulty on the opposite bank, where there was no path. His progress, therefore, was slow; and Elsie saw that if she did not linger he would be left behind Common politeness forbade this, and so she soon found herself alone, carrying his overcoat on one bank, and he keeping pace with her on the other. She comforted herself at first with the thought that, with the brawling, deafening stream between them, there would be no chance for embarrass-

ing conversation. But soon her sympathies became aroused as she saw him toilsomely making his way over the rocks and through the tangled thickets ; and, as she could not speak to him, she smiled her encouragement so often that she felt it would be impossible to go back to her old reserve.

Stanhope now came to a little opening in the brush. The cleared ground sloped evenly toward the stream, and its current was divided by a large rock. He hailed the opportunity here offered with delight, for he was very anxious to speak to her before they should join the others. So he startled Elsie by walking out into the clearing, away from the stream.

"Well ! I declare ; that's cool, to go and leave me alone without a word," she thought.

But she was almost terror-stricken to see him turn and dart toward the torrent like an arrow. With a long, flying leap, he landed on the rock in the midst of the stream ; and then, without a second's hesitation,with the impetus already acquired, sprang for the solid ground where she stood, struck it, wavered, and would have fallen backward into the water had not she,

quick as thought, stepped forward and given him her hand.

"You have saved me from a ducking, if not worse," he said, giving the little rescuing hand a warm pressure.

"Oh!" exclaimed she, panting, "please don't do any more dreadful things. I shall be careful how I make any wishes in your hearing again."

"I am sorry to hear you say that," he replied. And then there was an awkward silence.

Elsie could think of nothing better than to refer to the handkerchief they had left behind.

"Will you wait for me till I run and get it?" he asked.

"I will go back with you, if you will permit me," she said, timidly.

"Indeed, I could not ask so much of you as that."

"And yet you could about the same as risk your neck to gratify a whim of mine," she said, more gratefully than she intended.

"Please do not think," he replied, earnestly,

"that I have been practising cheap heroics. As I said, I was a country boy, and in my early home thought nothing of doing such things." But even the brief reference to that vanished home caused him to sigh deeply, and Elsie gave him a wistful look of sympathy.

For a few moments they walked on in silence. Then Mr. Stanhope turned, and, with some hesitation, said :

"Miss Alford, I did very wrong to stay after —after last evening. But my better judgment was borne down by invitations so cordial that I hardly knew how to resist them. At the same time I now realize that I should have done so. Indeed I would go away at once, would not such a course only make matters worse. And yet, after receiving so much kindness from your family, more than has blessed me for many long years—for since my dear mother died I have been quite alone in the world—I feel I cannot go away without some assurance or proof that you will forgive me for being such a marplot in your holiday.

Elsie's vexation with herself now knew no bounds, and she stopped in the path, deter-

mining that she would clear up matters, cost what it might.

"Mr. Stanhope," she said, "will you grant a request that will contain such assurance, or, rather, will show you that I am heartily ashamed of my foolish course? Will you not spend next Thanksgiving with us, and give me a chance to retrieve myself from first to last?"

His face brightened wonderfully, as he replied: "I will only be too glad to do so, if you truly wish it."

"I do wish it," she said, earnestly. "What must you think of me?" (His eyes then expressed much admiration; but hers were fixed on the ground and half filled with tears of vexation.) Then, with a pretty humility that was exquisite in its simplicity and artlessness, she added:

"You have noticed at home that they call me 'child'; and, indeed, I am little more than one, and now see that I have behaved like a very silly and naughty one toward you. I have trampled on every principle of hospitality, kindness, and good breeding. I have no pa-

tience with myself, and I wish another chance to show that I can do better. I—"

"Oh! Miss Alford, please do not judge yourself so harshly and unjustly," interrupted Stanhope.

"Oh, dear!" sighed Elsie, "I'm so sorry for what happened last night. We all might have had such a good time."

"Well, then," said Stanhope, demurely, "I suppose I ought to be also."

"And do you mean to say that you are not?" she asked, turning suddenly upon him.

"Oh! well, certainly, for your sake," he said, with rising color.

"But not for your own?" she asked, with almost the *naïveté* of a child.

He turned away with a perplexed laugh, and replied: "Really, Miss Alford, you are worse than the Catechism."

She looked at him with a half-amused, half-surprised expression and the thought occurred to her for the first time that it might not have been so disagreeable to him, after all; and somehow this thought was quite a relief to her. But she said:

"I thought you would regard me as a hoyden of the worst species."

"Because you kissed your brother? I have never for a moment forgotten that it was only your misfortune that I was not he."

"I should have remembered that it was not your fault. But here is your handkerchief, flying like a flag of truce. So let bygones be bygones. My terms are that you come again another year, and give me a chance to entertain my brother's friend as a sister ought."

"I am only too glad to submit to them," he eagerly replied; and then added, so ardently as to deepen the roses already in her cheeks: "If such are your punishments, Miss Alford, how delicious must be your favors!"

By common consent, the subject was dropped; and, with tongues released from awkward restraint, they chatted freely together, till in the early twilight they reached her home. The moment they entered George exultingly saw that the skies were serene.

But Elsie would never be the frolicsome child of the past again. As she surprised the family at dinner, so now at supper they could

scarcely believe that the elegant, graceful young lady was the witch of yesterday. She had resolved with all her soul to try to win some place in Mr. Stanhope's respect before he departed, and never did a little maiden succeed better.

In the evening they had music, and Mr. Stanhope pleased them all with his fine tenor, while Elsie delighted him by her clear bird-like voice. So the hours fled away.

"You think better of the 'horrid man,' little Sis," said George, as he kissed her good-night.

"I was the horrid one," said Elsie, penitently. "I can never forgive myself my absurd conduct. But he has promised to come again next Thanksgiving, and give me a chance to do better. So don't you fail to bring him."

George gave a long, low whistle, and then said: "Oh! ah! Seems to me you are coming on, for an innocent. Are we to get mixed up again in the twilight?"

"Nonsense!" said Elsie, with a peony face, and she slammed her door upon him.

The next morning, the young man took his leave, and Elsie's last words were:

"Mr. Stanhope, remember your promise."

And he did remember more than that, for this brief visit had enshrined a sweet, girlish face within his heart of hearts, and he no longer felt lonely and orphaned. He and George became the closest friends, and messages from the New England home came to him with increasing frequency, which he returned with prodigal interest. It also transpired that he occasionally wrote for the papers, and Elsie insisted that these should be sent to her; while he of course wrote much better with the certainty that she would be his critic. Thus, though separated, they daily became better acquainted, and during the year George found it not very difficult to induce his friend to make several visits.

But it was with joy that seemed almost too rich for earthly experience that he found himself walking up the village street with George the ensuing Thanksgiving eve. Elsie was at the door, and he pretended to be disconsolate that his reception was not the same as on the previous year. Indeed she had to endure not

a little chaffing, for her mistake was a family joke now.

It was a peerless Thanksgiving eve and day —one of the sunlighted heights of human happiness.

After dinner they all again took a walk up the brawling stream, and Stanhope and Elsie became separated from the rest, though not so innocently as on the former occasion.

"See!" cried Elsie, pointing to the well-remembered sapling, which she had often visited. "There fluttered our flag of truce last year."

Stanhope seized her hand, and said, eagerly:

"And here I again break the truce, and renew the theme we dropped at this place. Oh! Elsie, I have felt that kiss in the depths of my heart every hour since; and in that it led to my knowing and loving you it has made every day from that time one of thanksgiving. If you could return my love as I have dared to hope, it would be a happiness beyond words. If I could venture to take one more kiss, as a token that it is returned, I could keep Thanksgiving forever."

Her hand trembled in his, but was not with-

drawn. Her blushing face was turned away toward the brawling stream ; but she saw not its foam, she heard not its hoarse murmurs. A sweeter music was in her ears. She seemed under a delicious spell ; but soon became conscious that a pair of dark eyes were looking down eagerly, anxiously for her answer. Shyly raising hers, that now were like dewy violets, she said, with a little of her old witchery :

"I suppose you will have to kiss me this Thanksgiving, to make things even."

Stanhope needed no broader hint.

"I owe you a heavy grudge," said Mr. Alford, in the evening. "A year ago you robbed me of my child, for little, kittenish Elsie became a thoughtful woman from the day you were here. And now you are going to take away the daughter of my old age."

"Yes, indeed, husband. Now you know how my father felt," said Mrs. Alford, at the same time wiping something from the corner of her eye.

"Bless me, are you here?" said the old gentleman, wheeling round to his wife. "Mr. Stanhope, I have nothing more to say."

"I declare," exulted George, "that 'horrid man will devour' Elsie yet."

"Haw! haw! haw!" laughed big-voiced, big-hearted James. "The idea of our little witch of an Elsie being a minister's wife!"

* * * * * * *

It is again Thanksgiving eve. The trees are gaunt, the fields bare and brown, with dead leaves whirling across them; but a sweeter than June sunshine seems filling the cosey parlor where Elsie, a radiant bride, is receiving her husband's first kiss almost on the moment that she with her lips so unexpectedly kindled the sacred fire, three years before.

TAKEN ALIVE.

CHAPTER I.

SOMETHING BEFORE UNKNOWN.

CLARA HEYWARD was dressed in deep mourning, and it was evident that the emblems of bereavement were not worn merely in compliance with a social custom. Her face was pallid from grief, and her dark beautiful eyes were dim from much weeping. She sat in the little parlor of a cottage located in a large Californian city, and listened with apathetic expression as a young man pleaded for the greatest and most sacred gift that a woman can bestow. Ralph Brandt was a fine type of young vigorous manhood; and we might easily fancy that his strong, resolute face, now eloquent with deep feeling, was not one upon which a girl could look with indifference. Clara's words, however, revealed the apparent hopelessness of his suit.

"It's of no use, Ralph," she said; "I'm in no mood for such thoughts."

"You don't believe in me; you don't trust me," he resumed sadly. "You think that because I was once wild, and even worse, that I'll not be true to my promises and live an honest life. Have I not been honest when I knew that being so might cost me dear? Have I not told you of my past life and future purposes when I might have concealed almost everything?"

"It's not that, Ralph. I do believe you are sincere; and if the dreadful thing which has broken me down with sorrow had not happened, all might have been as you wish. I should have quite as much confidence in a young man who, like you, has seen evil and turned resolutely away from it, as in one who didn't know much about the world or himself either. What's more, father —"

At the word "father" her listless manner vanished, and she gave away to passionate sobs. "His foul murder is always before me," she wailed. "Oh, we were so happy! he was so kind, and made me his companion! I don't see how I can live without him. I can't think

of love and marriage when I remember how he died, and that the villain who killed him is at large and unpunished. What right have I to forget this great wrong and to try to be happy? No, no! the knife that killed him pierced my heart; and it's bleeding all the time. I'm not fit to be any man's wife; and I will not bring my great sorrow into any man's home."

Brandt sprang up and paced the room for a few moments, his brow contracted in deep thought. Then, apparently coming to a decision, he sat down by his companion and took her cold, unresisting hand.

"My poor little girl," he said kindly, "you don't half understand me yet. I love you all the more because you are heart-broken and pale with grief. That is the reason I have spoken so earnestly to-night. You will grieve yourself to death if left alone; and what good would your death do any one? It would spoil my life. Believe me, I would welcome you to my home with all your sorrow,—all the more because of your sorrow; and I'd be so kind and patient that you'd begin to smile again some day. That's what your father would wish if he could speak to you, and not that you should grieve

away your life for what can't be helped now. But I have a plan. It's right in my line to capture such scoundrels as the man who murdered your father; and what's more, I know the man, or rather I used to in old times. I've played many a game of euchre with him in which he cheated me out of money that I'd be glad to have now; and I'm satisfied that he does not know of any change in me. I was away on distant detective duty, you know, when your father was killed. I won't ask you to go over the painful circumstances; I can learn them at the prison. I shall try to get permission to search out Bute, desperate and dangerous as he is—"

"Oh, Ralph, Ralph," cried the girl, springing up, her eyes flashing through her tears, "if you will bring my father's murderer to justice, if you will prevent him from destroying other lives, as he surely will, you will find that I can refuse you nothing."

Then she paused, shook her head sadly, and withdrew the hand she had given him. "No," she resumed, "I shouldn't ask this; I don't ask it. As you say, he is desperate and dangerous; and he would take your life the moment

he dreamed of your purpose. I should only have another cause for sorrow."

Brandt now smiled as if he were master of the situation. "Why, Clara," he exclaimed, "don't you know that running down and capturing desperadoes is now part of my business?"

"Yes; but you can get plenty of work that isn't so dangerous."

"I should be a nice fellow to ask you to be my wife and yet show I was afraid to arrest your father's murderer. You needn't ask me to do this; you are not going to be responsible for my course in the least. I shall begin operations this very night, and have no doubt that I can get a chance to work on the case. Now don't burden your heart with any thoughts about my danger. I myself owe Bute as big a grudge as I can have against any human being. He cheated me and led me into deviltry years ago, and then I lost sight of him until he was brought to the prison of which your father was one of the keepers. I've been absent for the last three months, you know; but I didn't forget you or your father a day, and you remember I wrote you as soon as I heard of your trouble. I think your father sort of believed in me; he

never made me feel I wasn't fit to see you or to be with you, and I'd do more for him living or dead than for any other man."

"He did believe in you, Ralph, and always spoke well of you. Oh, you can't know how much I lost in him! After mother died he did not leave me to the care of strangers, but gave me most of his time when off duty. He sent me to the best schools, bought me books to read, and took me out evenings instead of going off by himself as so many men do. He was so kind and so brave; oh, oh! you know he lost his life by trying to do his duty when another man would have given up. Bute and two others broke jail. Father saw one of his assistants stabbed, and he was knocked down himself. He might have remained quiet and escaped with a few bruises; but he caught Bute's foot, and then the wretch turned and stabbed him. He told me all with his poor pale lips before he died. Oh, oh! when shall I forget?"

"You can never forget, dear; I don't ask anything contrary to nature. You were a good daughter, and so I believe you will be a good wife. But if I bring the murderer to justice, you will feel that a great wrong has been

righted,—that all has been done that can be done. Then you'll begin to think that your father wouldn't wish you to grieve yourself to death, and that as he tried to make you happy while he was living, so he will wish you to be happy now he's gone."

"It isn't a question of happiness. I don't feel as if I could ever be happy again; and so I don't see how I can make you or any one else happy."

"That's my look-out, Clara. I'd be only too glad to take you as you are. Come, now, this is December. If I bring Bute in by Christmas, what will you give me?"

She silently and eloquently gave him her hand; but her lips quivered so she could not speak. He kissed her hand as gallantly as any olden-time knight, then added a little brusquely:

"See here, little girl, I'm not going to bind you by anything that looks like a bargain. I shall attempt all I've said; and then on Christmas, or whenever I get back, I'll speak my heart to you again just as I have spoken now."

"When a man acts as you do, Ralph, any girl would find it hard to keep free. I shall follow

you night and day with my thoughts and prayers."

"Well, I'm superstitious enough to believe that I shall be safer and more successful on account of them. Clara, look me in the eyes before I go."

She looked up to his clear gray eyes as requested.

"I don't ask you to forget one who is dead; but don't you see how much you are to one who is living? Don't you see that in spite of all your sorrow you can still give happiness? Now, be as generous and kind as you can. Don't grieve hopelessly while I'm gone. That's what is killing you; and the thought of it fills me with dread. Try to think that you still have something and some one to live for. Perhaps you can learn to love me a little if you try, and then everything won't look so black. If you find you can't love me, I won't blame you; and if I lose you as my wife, you won't lose a true, honest friend."

For the first time the girl became vaguely conscious of the possiblity of an affection, a tie superseding all others; she began to see how it was possible to give herself to this man, not

from an impulse of gratitude or because she liked him better than any one else, but because of a feeling, new, mysterious, which gave him a sort of divine right in her. Something in the expression of his eyes had been more potent than his words; something subtle, swift as an electric spark had passed from him to her, awakening a faint, strange tumult in the heart she thought so utterly crushed. A few moments before, she could have promised resolutely to be his wife; she could have permitted his embrace with unresponsive apathy. Now she felt a sudden shyness. A faint color stole into her pale face, and she longed to be alone.

"Ralph," she faltered, "you are so generous, I—I don't know what to say."

"You needn't say anything till I come back. If possible, I will be here by Christmas, for you shouldn't be alone that day with your grief. Good-by."

The hand she gave him trembled, and her face was averted now.

"You will try to love me a little, won't you?"

"Yes," she whispered.

CHAPTER II.

A VISITOR AT THE MINE.

RALPH BRANDT was admirably fitted for the task he had undertaken. With fearlessness he united imperturbable coolness and wearied patience in pursuit of an object. Few knew him in his character of detective, and no one would have singled him out as an expert in his calling. The more difficult and dangerous the work, the more careless and indifferent his manner, giving the impression to superficial observers of being the very last person to be intrusted with responsible duty. But his chief and others on the force well knew that beneath Brandt's careless demeanor was concealed the relentless pertinacity of a bloodhound on track of its victim. With the trait of dogged pursuit all resemblance to the blood-thirsty animal ceased, and even the worst of criminals found him kind-hearted and good-natured *after* they were within his power. Failure was an idea not to be entertained. If the man to be caught

existed, he could certainly be found, was the principle on which our officer acted.

He readily obtained permission to attempt the capture of the escaped prisoner, Bute; but the murderer had disappeared, leaving no clew. Brandt learned that the slums of large cities and several mining camps had been searched in vain, also that the trains running east had been carefully watched. We need not try to follow his processes of thought, nor seek to learn how he soon came to the conclusion that his man was at some distant mining station working under an assumed name. By a kind of instinct his mind kept reverting to one of these stations with increasing frequency. It was not so remote in respect to mere distance; but it was isolated, off the lines of travel, with a gap of seventy miles between it and what might be termed civilization, and was suspected of being a sort of refuge for hard characters and fugitives from justice. Bute, when last seen, was making for the mountains in the direction of this mine. Invested with ample authority to bring in the outlaw dead or alive, Brandt followed this vague clew.

One afternoon Mr. Alford the superintendent

of the mine, was informed that a man wished to see him. There was ushered into his private office an elderly gentleman who appeared as if he might be a prospecting capitalist or one of the owners of the mine. The superintendent was kept in doubt as to the character of the visitor for a few moments while Brandt sought by general remarks and leading questions to learn the disposition of the man who must, from the necessities of the case, become to some extent his ally in securing the ends of justice. Apparently the detective was satisfied, for he asked suddenly,—

"By the way, have you a man in your employ by the name of Bute?"

"No, sir," replied Mr. Alford, with a little surprise.

"Have you a man, then, who answers to the following description?" He gave a brief word photograph of the criminal.

"You want this man?" Mr. Alford asked in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Well, really, sir, I would like to know your motive, indeed, I may add, your authority, for,—"

"There it is," Brandt smilingly remarked, handing the superintendent a paper.

"Oh certainly, certainly," said Mr. Alford, after a moment. "This is all right; and I am bound to do nothing to obstruct you in the performance of your duty." He now carefully closed the door and added, "What do you want this man for?"

"It's a case of murder."

"Phew! Apparently he is one of the best men on the force."

"Only apparently; I know him well."

Mr. Alford's brow clouded with anxiety, and after a moment he said, "Mr.—how shall I address you?"

"You had better continue to call me by the name under which I was introduced,—Brown."

"Well, Mr. Brown, you have a very difficult and hazardous task, and you must be careful how you involve me in your actions. I shall not lay a straw in your way, but I cannot openly help you. It is difficult for me to get labor here at best; and it is understood that I ask no questions and deal with men on the basis simply of their relations to me. As long as I act on this understanding, I can keep public sentiment

with me and enforce some degree of discipline. If it were known that I was aiding or abetting you in the enterprise you have in hand, my life would not be worth a rush. There are plenty in camp who would shoot me, just as they would you should they learn of your design. I fear you do not realize what you are attempting. A man like yourself, elderly and alone, has no better chance of taking such a fellow as you describe Bute to be, than of carrying a ton of ore on his back down the mountain. In all sincerity, sir, I must advise you to depart quietly and expeditiously, and give no one besides myself a hint of your errand."

"Will you please step into the outer office and make sure that no one is within ear-shot," said Brandt, quietly.

When Mr. Alford returned, the elderly man apparently had disappeared, and a smiling smooth-faced young fellow with short brown hair sat in his place. His host stared, the transformation was so great.

"Mr. Alford," said the detective, "I understand my business and the risks it involves. All I ask of you is that I may not be interfered with so far as you are concerned; and my chief ob-

ject in calling is to prevent your being surprised by anything you may see or hear. About three miles or thereabouts from here, on the road running east, there is a fellow who keeps a tavern. Do you know him?"

"I know no good of him. He's the worst nuisance I have to contend with, for he keeps some of my men disabled much of the time."

"Well, I knew Bute years ago, and I can make him think I am now what I was then, only worse; and I will induce him to go with me to raid that tavern. If this plan fails, I shall try another, for I am either going to take Bute alive or else get ample proof that he is dead. There may be some queer goings-on before I leave, and all I ask is that you will neither interfere nor investigate. You may be as ignorant and non-committal as you please. I shall report progress to you, however, and may need your testimony, but will see to it that it is given by you as one who had nothing to do with the affair. Now please show me your quarters, so that I can find you at night if need be; also Bute's sleeping-place and the lay of the land to some extent. You'll find that I can take everything in mighty quick. See, I'm

the elderly gentleman again," and he resumed his diguise with marvellous celerity.

Mr. Alford led the way through the outer office; and the two clerks writing there saw nothing to awaken the slightest suspicion. The superintendent's cottage stood on the road leading to the mine and somewhat apart from the other buildings. On the opposite side of the highway was a thicket of pines which promised cover until one plunged into the unbroken forest that covered the mountain-side.

Brandt observed this, and remarked, "I've studied the approaches to your place a little as I came along; but I suppose I shall have to give a day or two more to the work before making my attempt."

"Well," rejoined Mr. Alford, who was of rather a social turn and felt the isolation of his life, "why not be my guest for a time? I'll take the risk if you will remain incog., and keep aloof from the men."

"That I should do in any event till ready to act. Thank you for your kindness, for it may simplify my task very much. I will see to it that I do not compromise you. When I'm ready to snare my bird, you can dismiss me a little ostentatiously for New York."

Brandt's horse was now ordered to the stable. The two men entered the cottage, and soon afterwards visited the different points of interest, Mr. Alford giving the natural impression that he was showing an interested stranger the appliances for working the mine. At one point he remarked in a low tone, "That's Bute's lodging-place. A half-breed, named Apache Jack, who speaks little English, lives with him."

Brandt's seemingly careless and transitory glance rested on a little shanty and noted that it was separated from others of its class by a considerable interval.

"Bute, you say, is on the day-shift."

"Yes, he won't be up till six o'clock."

"I'll manage to see him then without his knowing it."

"Be careful. I take my risk on the ground of your good faith and prudence."

"Don't fear."

CHAPTER III.

THWARTED.

BRANDT maintained his disguise admirably. His presence caused little comment, and he was spoken of as a visiting stockholder of the mine. During his walk with Mr. Alford he appeared interested only in machinery, ores, etc., but his trained eyes made a topographical map of surroundings, and everything centred about Bute's shanty. In the evening he amply returned his host's hospitality by comic and tragic stories of criminal life. The next day he began to lay his plans carefully, and disappeared soon after breakfast with the ostensible purpose of climbing a height at some distance for the sake of the prospect. He soon doubled round, noting every covert approach to Bute's lodgings. His eye and ear were as quick as an Indian's; but he still maintained, in case he was observed, the manner of an elderly stranger strolling about to view the region.

By noon he felt that he had the immediate

locality by heart. His afternoon task was to explore the possibilities of a stream that crossed the mine road something over a mile away, and for this purpose he mounted his horse. He soon reached the shallow ford, and saw that the water was backed up for a considerable distance, and that the shallows certainly extended around a high, jutting rock which hid the stream from that point and beyond from the road. The bed appeared smooth, firm and sandy, and he waded his horse up the gentle current until he was concealed from the highway. A place, however, was soon reached where the water came tumbling down over impassable rocks; and he was compelled to ascend the wooded shore. This he did on the side nearest to the mine house, and found that with care he could lead his horse to a point that could not be, he thought, over half a mile from the superintendent's cottage. Here there was a little dell around which the pines grew so darkly and thickly that he determined to make it his covert should he fail in his first attempt. His object now was to see if his estimate of proximity to the mine was correct; and leaving his horse, he pushed up the mountain-side. At

last he reached a precipitous ledge. Skirting this a short distance, he found a place of comparatively easy ascent, and soon learned with much satisfaction that he was not over two hundred yards from the thicket opposite Mr. Alford's quarters. These discoveries all favored possible future operations; and he retraced his steps, marking his returning path by bits of white paper, held in place by stones against the high, prevailing winds. Near the spot where he had left his horse he found a nook among the rocks in which a fire would be well hidden. Having marked the place carefully with his eye and obtained his bearings, he led his horse back to the stream and reached the unfrequented road again without being observed.

His next task was to discover some kind of a passage-way from the mine road to a point on the main highway, leading to the west and out of the mountains. He found no better resource than to strike directly into the forest and travel by points of the compass. Fortunately the trees were lofty and comparatively open, and he encountered no worse difficulties than some steep and rugged descents, and at last emerged on the post road at least a mile to the west of

the tavern, which stood near its intersection with the mine road. Returning, he again marked out a path with paper as he had before. The sun was now low in the sky; and as he trotted toward the mine, he had but one more precaution to take, and that was to find a place where the trees were sufficiently open to permit him to ride into their shade at night in case he wished to avoid parties upon the road. Having indicated two or three such spots by a single bit of paper that would glimmer in the moonlight, he joined Mr. Alford at supper, feeling that his preparations were nearly complete When they were alone, he told his host that it would be best not to gratify his curiosity, for then he could honestly say that he knew nothing of any detective's plans or whereabouts.

"I cannot help feeling," said Mr. Alford, "that you are playing with fire over a powder magazine. Now that I know you better, I hate to think of the risk that you are taking. It has troubled me terribly all day. I feel as if we were on the eve of a tragedy. You had better leave quietly in the morning and bring a force later that would make resistance impos-

sible, or else give it up altogether. Why should you throw away your life? I tell you again that if the men get a hint of your character or purpose they will hunt you to death."

"It's a part of my business to incur such risks," replied Brandt, quietly. "Besides, I have a motive in this case which would lead me to take a man out of the jaws of hell."

"That's what you may find you are attempting here. Well, we're in for it now, I suppose, since you are so determined."

"I don't think you will appear involved in the affair at all. In the morning you give me a sack of grain for my horse and some provisions for myself, and then bid farewell to Mr. Brown in the most open and natural manner possible. You may not see me again. It is possible I may have to borrow a horse of you if my scheme to-night don't work. It will be returned or paid for very soon."

"Bute has a pony. He brought it with him, and he and Apache Jack between them manage to keep it. They stable it nights in a little shed back of their shanty."

"I had discovered this, and hope to take the man away on his pony. I understand why Bute

keeps the animal. He knew that he might have to travel suddenly and fast."

The next morning Mr. Alford parted with Brandt as had been arranged, the latter starting ostensibly for the nearest railway station. All day long the superintendent was nervous and anxious; but he saw no evidences of suspicion or uneasiness among those in his employ.

Brandt rode at a sharp canter as long as he was in sight, and then approached the stream slowly and warily. When satisfied that he was unobserved, he again passed up its shallow bed around the concealing rock, and sought his hiding-place on the mountain-side. Aware that the coming nights might require ceaseless activity, his first measure was to secure a few hours of sound sleep; and he had so trained himself that he could, as it were, store up rest against long and trying emergencies. The rocks sheltered him against the wind, and a fire gave all the comfort his hardy frame required, as he reposed on his couch of pine-needles. Early in the afternoon he fed his horse, took a hearty meal himself, and concealed the remaining store so that no wild creatures could get at it. At early twilight he returned by way of the

stream and hid his horse well back in the woods near the mine. To this he now went boldly, and inquired for Tim Atkins, Bute's assumed name. He was directed to the shanty with which he had already made himself so familiar.

Bute was found alone, and was much surprised at sight of his old gambling acquaintance of better days, for his better days were those of robbery before he had added the deeper stain of murder. Brandt soon allayed active fears and suspicions by giving the impression that in his *descensus* he had reached the stage of robbery and had got on the scent of some rich booty in the mountains.

"But how did you know I was here?" demanded Bute.

"I didn't know it," replied Brandt, adopting his old vernacular; "but I guessed as much, for I knew there was more'n one shady feller in this gang, and I took my chances on findin' you, for says I to myself, if I can find Bute, I've found the right man to help me crack a ranch when there's some risk and big plunder."

He then disclosed the fact of hearing that the keeper of the tavern had accumulated a good sum of hard money, and was looking out for a

chance to send it to a bank. "We can save him the trouble, yer know," he concluded facetiously.

"Well," said Bute, musingly, "I'm gittin' tired of this dog's life, and I reckon I'll go snacks with yer and then put out fer parts unknown. I was paid t'other day, and there ain't much owin' me here. I guess it'll be safer fer me ter keep movin' on, too."

"You may well say that, Bute. I heard below that there was goin' to be some investigations inter this gang, and that there was more 'n one feller here whose pictur was on exhibition."

"That so?" said Bute, hastily. "Well, I'll go with yer ter-night, fer it's time I was movin'. I kin tell yer one thing, though,—there'll be no investigations here unless a fair-sized regiment makes it. Every man keeps his shooter handy."

"Hanged if we care how the thing turns out. You and me'll be far enough away from the shindy. Now make your arrangements prompt; for we must be on the road by nine o'clock, so we can get through early in the night and have a good start with the swag. My plan is to am-

bush the whiskey shop, go and demand drinks soon after everybody is gone, and then proceed to business."

"Can't we let my mate, Apache Jack, in with us? I'll stand for him."

"No, no, I don't know anything about Apache Jack; and I can trust you. We can manage better alone, and I'd rather have one-half than one-third."

"Trust me, kin you? you—fool," thought Bute. "So ye thinks I'll sit down and divide the plunder socially with you when I kin give yer a quiet dig in the ribs and take it all. One more man now won't matter. I'm a goin' ter try fer enough ter-night ter take me well out of these parts."

Bute's face was sinister enough to suggest any phase of evil, and Brandt well knew that he was capable of what he meditated. It was now the policy of both parties, however, to be very friendly, and Bute was still further mellowed by a draught of liquor from Brandt's flask.

They had several games of cards in which it was managed that Bute's winnings should be the larger; and at nine in the evening they

started on what was to Bute another expedition of robbery and murder. Mr. Alford, who was on the alert, saw them depart with a deep sigh of relief. The night was cloudy; but the moon gave plenty of light for travelling. Brandt soon secured his horse, and then appeared to give full rein to his careless, reckless spirit.

As they approached the stream, he remarked, "I say Bute, it's too bad we can't use the pasteboards while on the jog; but I can win a five out of you by an old game of ours. I bet you I can empty my revolver quicker 'n you can."

"We'd better save our amernition and make no noise."

"Oh, shaw! I always have better luck when I'm free and careless like. It's your sneaking fellers that always get caught. Besides, who'll notice? This little game is common enough all through the mountains, and everybody knows that there's no mischief in such kind of firing. I want to win back some of my money."

"Well then, take you up; go ahead."

Instantly from Brandt's pistol there were six reports following one another so quickly that they could scarcely be distinguished.

"Now beat that if you can!" cried Brandt, who had a second and concealed revolver ready for an emergency.

"The fool!" thought Bute, "to put himself at the marcy of any man. I can pluck him to-night like a winged pa'tridge;" but he, too, fired almost as quickly as his companion.

"You only used five ca'tridges in that little game, my friend," said Brandt.

"Nonsense! I fired so quick you couldn't count 'em."

"Now see here, Bute," resumed Brandt, in an aggrieved tone, "you've got to play fair with me. I've cut my eye-teeth since you used to fleece me, and I'll swear you fired only five shots. Let's load and try again."

"What's the use of sich —— nonsense? You'll swar that you fired the quickest; and of course I'll swar the same, and there's nobody here ter jedge. What's more, Ralph Brandt, I wants you and every man ter know that I always keeps a shot in reserve, and that I never misses. So let's load and jog on, and stop foolin'."

"That scheme has failed," thought Brandt, as he replaced the shells with cartridges.

His purpose was to find a moment when his

companion was completely in his power, and it came sooner that he expected. When they drew near the brook, it was evident that Bute's pony was thirsty, for it suddenly darted forward and thrust its nose into the water. Therefore, for an instant, Bute was in advance with his back toward the detective. Covering the fellow with his revolver, Brandt shouted,—

"Bute, throw up your hands; surrender, or you are a dead man!"

Instantly the truth flashed through the outlaw's mind. Instead of complying, he threw himself forward over the pony's neck and urged the animal forward. Brandt fired, and Bute fell with a splash into the water. At that moment three miners, returning from the tavern, came shouting to the opposite side of the stream. The frightened pony, relieved of its burden, galloped homeward. Brandt also withdrew rapidly toward the mine for some distance, and then rode into the woods. Having tied his horse well back from the highway, he reconnoitered the party that had so inopportunely interfered with his plans. He discovered that they were carrying Bute, who, from his groans and oaths, was evidently not dead,

though he might be mortally wounded. His rescuers were breathing out curses and threats of vengeance against Brandt, now known to be an officer of the law.

"The job has become a little complicated now," muttered Brandt, after they had passed; "and I must throw them off the scent. There will be a dozen out after me soon."

He remounted his horse, stole silently down the road, crossed the stream, and then galloped to the tavern, and calling out the keeper, asked if there was any shorter road out of the mountains than the one leading to the west. Being answered in the negative, he rode hastily away. On reaching the place where he had struck this road the previous day, he entered the woods, followed the rugged trail that he had marked by bits of paper, and slowly approached the mine road again near the point where the stream crossed it. He then reconnoitered and learned that there was evidently a large party exploring the woods between the stream and the mine.

At last they all gathered at the ford for consultation, and Brandt heard one say,—

"We're wastin' time, beatin' round here.

He'd naterly put fer the lowlands as soon as he found he was balked in takin' his man. I move we call on Whiskey Bob, and see if a man's rode that way ter-night."

A call on Whiskey Bob was apparently always acceptable; and the party soon disappeared down the road,—some on horses and more on foot. Brandt then quietly crossed the road and gained his retreat on the mountain-side.

"I must camp here now till the fellow dies, and I can prove it, or until I can get another chance," was his conclusion as he rubbed down and fed his horse.

CHAPTER IV.

TAKEN ALIVE.

AFTER taking some refreshment himself, Brandt decided to go to the thicket opposite the superintendent's house for a little observation. He soon reached this outlook, and saw that something unusual was occurring in the cottage. At last the door opened, and Bute was assisted to his shanty by two men. They had scarcely disappeared before Brandt darted across the road and knocked for admittance.

"Great Scott! you here?" exclaimed Mr. Alford.

"Yes, and here I'm going to stay till I take my man," replied the detective, with a laugh. "Don't be alarmed. I shall not remain in your house, but in the neighborhood."

"You are trifling with your life, and, I may add, with mine."

"Not at all. Come up to your bedroom. First draw the curtains close, and we'll compare notes. I won't stay but a few moments."

Mr. Alford felt that it was best to comply, for some one might come and find them talking in the hall. When Brandt entered the apartment, he threw himself into a chair and laughed in his low careless style as he said, "Well, I almost bagged my game to-night, and would have done so had not three of your men, returning from the tavern, interfered."

"There's a party out looking for you now."

"I know it; but I've put them on the wrong trail. What I want to learn is, will Bute live?"

"Yes; your shot made a long flesh-wound just above his shoulders. A little closer, and it would have cut his vertebræ and finished him. He has lost a good deal of blood, and could not be moved for some days except at some risk."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes."

"Well, he may have to incur the risk. I only wish to be certain that he will not take it on his own act at once. You'll soon miss him in any event."

"The sooner the better. I wish your aim had been surer."

"That wasn't my good luck. Next time I'll have to shoot closer or else take him alive."

"But you can't stay in this region. They will all be on the alert now."

"Oh, no. The impression will be general to-morrow that I've made for the lowlands as fast as my horse could carry me. Don't you worry. Till I move again, I'm safe enough. All I ask of you now is to keep Bute in his own shanty, and not to let him have more than one man to take care of him if possible. Good-night. You may not see me again, and then again you may."

"Well, now that you are here," said the superintendent, who was naturally brave enough, "spend an hour or two, or else stay till just before daylight. I confess I am becoming intensely interested in your adventure, and would take a hand in it if I could; but you know well enough that if I did, and it became known, I would have to find business elsewhere very suddenly,—that is, if given the chance."

"I only wish your passive co-operation. I should be glad, however, if you would let me take a horse, if I must."

"Certainly, as long as you leave my black mare."

Brandt related what had occurred, giving a

comical aspect to everything, and then after reconnoitering the road from a darkened window, regained his cover in safety. He declined to speak of his future plans or to give any clew to his hiding-place, to which he now returned.

During the few remaining hours of darkness and most of the next day, he slept and lounged about his fire. The next night was too bright and clear for anything beyond a reconnoissance, and he saw evidences of an alertness which made him very cautious. He did not seek another interview with Mr. Alford, for now nothing was to be gained by it.

The next day proved cloudy, and with night began a violent storm of wind and rain. Brandt cowered over his fire till nine o'clock, and then taking a slight draught from his flask, chuckled, "This is glorious weather for my work. Here's to Clara's luck this time!"

In little over an hour he started for the mine, near which he concealed his horse. Stealing about in the deep shadows, he soon satisfied himself that no one was on the watch, and then approaching the rear of Bute's shanty found to his joy that the pony was in the shed. A chink in the board siding enabled him to look into the

room which contained his prey; he started as he saw Apache Jack, instantly recognizing in him another criminal for whom a large reward was offered.

"Better luck than I dreamed of," he thought. "I shall take them both; but I now shall have to borrow a horse of Alford;" and he glided away, secured an animal from the stable, and tied it near his own. In a short time he was back at his post of observation. It had now become evident that no one even imagined that there was danger while such a storm was raging. The howling wind would drown all ordinary noises; and Brandt determined that the two men in the shanty should be on their way to jail that night. When he again put his eye to the chink in the wall, Bute was saying,—

"Well, no one will start fer the mountings while this storm lasts, but, wound or no wound, I must get out of this as soon as it's over. There's no safety fer me here now."

"Ef they comes fer you, like enough they'll take me," replied Apache Jack, who, now that he was alone with his confederate, could speak his style of English fast enough. His character of half-breed was a disguise which his dark

complexion had suggested. "Ter-morrer night, ef it's clar, we'll put out fer the easterd. I know of a shanty in the woods not so very fur from here in which we kin put up till yer's able to travel furder. Come, now, take a swig of whiskey with me and then we'll sleep; there's no need of our watchin' any longer on a night like this. I'll jest step out an' see ef the pony's safe; sich a storm 's 'nuff ter scare him off ter the woods."

"Well, jest lay my shooter on the cha'r here aside me 'fore you go. I feel safer with the little bull-dog in reach."

This the man did, then putting his own revolver on the table, that it might not get wet, began to unbar the door. Swift as a shadow Brandt glided out of the shed and around on the opposite side of the shanty.

An instant later Bute was paralyzed by seeing his enemy enter the open door. Before the outlaw could realize that Brandt was not a feverish vision induced by his wound, the detective had captured both revolvers, and was standing behind the door awaiting Apache Jack's return.

"Hist!" whispered Brandt, "not a sound, or you will both be dead in two minutes."

Bute's nerves were so shattered that he could scarcely have spoken, even if he had been reckless enough to do so. He felt himself doomed; and when brutal natures like his succumb, they usually break utterly. Therefore he could do no more than shiver with unspeakable dread as if he had an ague.

Soon Apache Jack came rushing in out of the storm, to be instantly confronted by Brandt's revolver. The fellow glanced at the table, and seeing his own weapon was gone, instinctively half drew a long knife.

"Put that knife on the table!" ordered Brandt, sternly. "Do you think I'd allow any such foolishness?"

The man now realized his powerlessness, and obeyed; and Brandt secured this weapon also.

"See here, Apache Jack, or whatever your name is, don't you run your head into a noose. You know I'm empowered to arrest Bute, and you don't know anything about the force I have at hand. All you've got to do is to obey me, an officer of the law, like a good citizen. If you don't, I'll shoot you; and that's all there is about it. Will you obey orders?"

"I no understan'."

"Stop lying! You understand English as well as I do, and I'll suspect *you* if you try that on again. Come, now! I've no time to lose. It's death or obedience!"

"You can't blame a fellow fer standin' by his mate," was the sullen yet deprecatory reply.

"I can blame any man and arrest or shoot him too, who obstructs the law. You must obey me for the next half-hour to prove that you are not Bute's accomplice."

"He's only my mate, and our rule is ter stand by each other; but, as you say, I can't help myself, and there's no use of my goin' ter jail."

"I should think not," added Brandt, appealing to the fellow's selfish hope of escaping further trouble if Bute was taken. "Now get my prisoner out of bed and dress him as soon as possible."

"But he ain't able ter be moved. The superintendent said he wasn't."

"That's my business, not yours. Do as I bid you."

"Why don't yer yell for help?" said Bute, in a hoarse whisper.

"Because he knows I'd shoot him if he did," remarked Brandt, coolly.

"Come, old man," said Jack, "luck's agin yer. Ef there's any hollerin' to be done, yer's as able ter do that as I be."

"Quick, quick! jerk him out of bed and get him into his clothes. I won't permit one false move."

Jack now believed that his only means of safety was to be as expeditious as possible, and that if Bute was taken safely he would be left unmolested. People of their class rarely keep faith with one another when it is wholly against their interests to do so. Therefore, in spite of the wounded man's groans, he was quickly dressed and his hands tied behind him. As he opened his mouth to give expression to his protests, he found himself suddenly gagged by Brandt, who stood behind him. Then a strap was buckled about his feet, and he lay on the floor helpless and incapable of making a sound.

"Now, Jack," said Brandt, "go before me and bridle and saddle the pony; then bring him to the door."

Jack obeyed.

"Now put Bute upon him. I'll hold his head; but remember I'm covering you with a dead bead all the time."

"No need of that. I'm civil enough now."

"Well, you know we're sort of strangers and it's no more than prudent for me to be on the safe side till we part company. That's right, strap his feet underneath. Now lead the pony in such directions as I say. Don't try to make off till I'm through with you, or you'll be shot instantly. I shall keep within a yard of you all the time."

They were not long in reaching the horse that Brandt had borrowed, and Jack said, "I s'pose I kin go now."

"First untie Bute's hands so he can guide the pony."

As the fellow attempted to do this, and his two hands were together, Brandt slipped a pair of light steel handcuffs over his wrists, and the man was in his power. Almost before the new prisoner could recover from his surprise, he was lifted on the borrowed horse, and his legs also tied underneath.

"This ain't fa'r. You promised ter let me go when you got Bute off."

"I have'nt got him off yet. Of course I can't let you go right back and bring a dozen men after us. You must be reasonable."

The fellow yelled for help; but the wind swept the sound away.

"If you do that again, I'll gag you, too," said Brandt. "I tell you both once more, and I won't repeat the caution, that your lives depend on obedience." Then he mounted, and added, "Bute, I 'm going to untie your hands, and you must ride on ahead of me. I'll lead Jack's horse."

In a moment he had his prisoners in the road, and was leaving the mine at a sharp pace. Bute was so cowed and dazed with terror that he obeyed mechanically. The stream was no longer a shallow brook, but a raging torrent which almost swept them away as Brandt urged them relentlessly through it. The tavern was dark and silent as they passed quickly by it. Then Brandt took the gag from Bute's mouth, and he groaned, cursed, and pleaded by turns. Hour after hour he urged them forward, until at last Bute gave out and fell forward on the pony's neck. Brandt dismounted and gave the exhausted man a draught from his flask.

"Oh, shoot me and have done with it!" groaned Bute; "I 'd rather be shot than hanged anyhow."

"Couldn't think of it," replied the detective, cheerily. "My rule is to take prisoners alive, so that they can have a fair trial and be sure that they get justice. I'd take you the rest of the way in a bed if I could, but if you can't sit up, I'll have to tie you on. We'll reach a friend of mine by daylight, and then you can ride in a wagon, so brace up."

This the outlaw did for a time, and then he gave out utterly and was tied more securely to the pony. Out of compassion, Brandt thereafter travelled more slowly; and when the sun was an hour high, he led his forlorn captives to the house of a man whom he knew could be depended upon for assistance. After a rest sufficient to give Bute time to recover somewhat, the remainder of the journey was made without any incident worth mentioning, and the prisoners were securely lodged in jail on the evening of the 24th of December.

CHAPTER V.

WHAT BRANDT SAW CHRISTMAS EVE.

BRANDT'S words and effort had had their natural effect on the mind of Clara Heyward. They proved an increasing diversion of her thoughts, and slowly dispelled the morbid, leaden grief under which she had been sinking. Her new anxiety in regard to her lover's fortune and possible fate was a healthful counter-irritant. Half consciously she yielded to the influence of his strong hopeful spirit, and almost before she was aware of it she, too, began to hope. Chief of all, his manly tenderness and unbargaining love stole into her heart like a subtle balm; and responsive love, the most potent of remedies, was renewing her life. She found herself counting the days and then the hours that must intervene before the 25th. On Christmas Eve her woman's nature triumphed, and she instinctively added such little graces to her toilet as her sombre costume permitted. She

also arranged her beautiful hair in the style which she knew he admired. He might come; and she determined that his first glance should reveal that he was not serving one who was coldly apathetic to his brave endeavor and loyalty.

Indeed, even she herself wondered at the changes that had taken place during the brief time which had elapsed since their parting. There was a new light in her eyes; and a delicate bloom tinged her cheeks.

"Oh," she murmured, "it's all so different now that I feel that I can live for him and make him happy."

She was sure that she could welcome him in a way that would assure him of the fulfilment of all his hopes; but when he did come with his eager, questioning eyes, she suddenly found herself under a strange restraint, tongue-tied and embarrassed. She longed to put her arms about his neck and tell him all,—the new life, the new hope which his look of deep affection had kindled; and in effort for self-control, she seemed to him almost cold. He therefore became perplexed and uncertain of his ground, and took refuge in the details of his expedition,

meanwhile mentally assuring himself that he must keep his word and put no constraint on the girl contrary to the dictates of her heart.

As his mind grew clearer, his keen observation began to reveal hopeful indications. She was listening intently with approval, and something more in her expression, he dared to fancy. Suddenly he exclaimed, "How changed you are for the better, Clara! You are lovelier to-night than ever you were. What is it in your face that is so sweet and bewildering? You were a pretty girl before; now you are a beautiful woman."

The color came swiftly at his words, and she faltered as she averted her eyes, "Please go on with your story, Ralph. You have scarcely begun yet. I fear you were in danger."

He came and stood beside her. "Clara," he pleaded, "look at me."

Hesitatingly she raised her eyes to his.

"Shall I tell you what I hope I see?"

The faintest suggestion of a smile hovered about her trembling lips.

"I hope I see what you surely see in mine. Come, Clara, you shall choose before you hear my story. Am I to be your husband or friend?

for I've vowed that you shall not be without a loyal protector."

"Ralph, Ralph," she cried, springing up and hiding her face on his shoulder, "I have no choice at all. You know how I loved papa; but I've learned that there's another and different kind of love. I didn't half understand you when you first spoke; now I do. You will always see in my eyes what you've seen to-night."

SUSIE ROLLIFFE'S CHRISTMAS.

PICKNICKING in December would be a dreary experience even if one could command all the appliances of comfort which outdoor life permitted. This would be especially true in the latitude of Boston and on the bleak hills overlooking that city and its environing waters. Dreary business indeed Ezekiel Watkins regarded it as he shivered over the smoky campfire which he maintained with difficulty. The sun was sinking into the southwest so early in the day that he remarked irritably, "Durned if it was worth while for it to rise at all."

Ezekiel Watkins, or Zeke, as he was generally known among his comrades, had ceased to be a resident on that rocky hillside from pleasure. His heart was in a Connecticut val-

ley in more senses than one; and there was not a more homesick soldier in the army. It will be readily guessed that the events of our story occurred more than a century ago. The shots fired at Bunker Hill had echoed in every nook and corner of the New-England colonies, and the heart of Zeke Watkins, among thousands of others, had been fired with military ardor. With companions in like frame of mind he had trudged to Boston, breathing slaughter and extermination against the red-coated instruments of English tyranny. To Zeke the expedition had many of the elements of an extended bear-hunt, much exalted. There was a spice of danger and a rich promise of novelty and excitement. The march to the lines about Boston had been a continuous ovation; grandsires came out from the wayside dwellings and blessed the rustic soldiers; they were dined profusely by the housewives, and if not wined, there had been slight stint in New-England rum and cider; the apple-cheeked daughters of the land gave them the meed of heroes in advance, and abated somewhat of their ruddy hues at the thought of the dangers

to be incurred. Zeke was visibly dilated by all this attention, incense, and military glory; and he stepped forth from each village and hamlet as if the world were scarcely large enough for the prowess of himself and companions. Even on parade he was as stiff as his long-barrelled flintlock, looking as if England could hope for no quarter at his hands; yet he permitted no admiring glances from bright eyes to escape him. He had not traversed half the distance between his native hamlet and Boston before he was abundantly satisfied that pretty Susie Rolliffe had made no mistake in honoring him among the recruits by marks of especial favor. He wore in his squirrel-skin cap the bit of blue ribbon she had given him, and with the mien of a Homeric hero had intimated darkly that it might be crimson before she saw it again. She had clasped her hands, stifled a little sob, and looked at him admiringly. He needed no stronger assurance than her eyes conveyed at that moment. She had been shy and rather unapproachable before, sought by others than himself, yet very chary of her smiles and

favors to all. Her ancestors had fought the Indians, and had bequeathed to the demure little maiden much of their own indomitable spirit. She had never worn her heart on her sleeve, and was shy of her rustic admirers chiefly because none of them had realized her ideals of manhood created by fireside stories of the past.

Zeke's chief competitor for Susie's favor had been Zebulon Jarvis; and while he had received little encouragement, he laid his unostentatious devotion at her feet unstintedly, and she knew it. Indeed, she was much inclined to laugh at him, for he was singularly bashful, and a frown from her overwhelmed him. Unsophisticated Susie reasoned that any one who could be so afraid of *her* could not be much of a man. She had never heard of his doing anything bold and spirited. It might be said, indeed, that the attempt to wring a livelihood for his widowed mother and for his younger brothers and sisters from the stumpy, rocky farm required courage of the highest order; but it was not of a kind that appealed to the fancy of a romantic young

girl. Nothing finer or grander had Zebulon attempted before the recruiting officer came to Opinquake, and when he came, poor Zeb appeared to hang back so timorously that he lost what little place he had in Susie's thoughts. She was ignorant of the struggle taking place in his loyal heart. More intense even than his love for her was the patriotic fire which smouldered in his breast; yet when other young men were giving in their names and drilling on the village green, he was absent. To the war appeals of those who sought him, he replied briefly, "Can't leave till fall."

"But the fighting will be over long before that," it was urged.

"So much the better for others, then, if not for me."

Zeke Watkins made it his business that Susie should hear this reply in the abbreviated form of, "So much the better, then."

She had smiled scornfully, and it must be added, a little bitterly. In his devotion Zeb had been so helpless, so diffidently unable to take his own part and make advances that she, from odd little spasms of sympathy, had taken

his part for him, and laughingly repeated to herself in solitude all the fine speeches which she perceived he would be glad to make. But, as has been intimated, it seemed to her droll indeed, that such a great stalwart fellow should appear panic-stricken in her diminutive presence. In brief, he had been timidity embodied under her demurely-mischievous blue eyes; and now that the recruiting officer had come and marched away with his squad without him, she felt incensed that such a chicken-hearted fellow had dared to lift his eyes to her.

"It would go hard with the Widow Jarvis and all those children if Zeb 'listed," Susie's mother had ventured in half-hearted defence, for did she not look upon him as a promising suitor.

"The people of Opinquake wouldn't let the widow or the children starve," replied Susie, indignantly. "If I was a big fellow like him, my country would not call me twice. Think how grandfather left grandma and all the children!"

"Well, I guess Zeb thinks he has his hands full, wrastling with that stony farm."

"He needn't come to see me any more, or steal glances at me 'tween meetings on Sunday," said the girl, decisively. "He cuts a sorry figure beside Zeke Watkins, who was the first to give in his name, and who began to march like a soldier even before he left us."

"Yes," said Mrs. Rolliffe; "Zeke was very forward. If he holds out as he begun— Well, well, Zeke allus was a little forward, and able to speak for himself. You are young yet, Susan, and may learn before you reach my years that the race isn't allus to the swift. Don't be in haste to promise yourself to any of the young men."

"Little danger of my promising myself to a man who is afraid even of me! I want a husband like grandfather. He wasn't afraid to face anything, and he honored his wife by acting as if she wasn't afraid either."

Zeb gave Susie no chance to bestow the rebuffs she had premeditated. He had been down to witness the departure of the Opinquake quota, and had seen Susie's farewell to Zeke Watkins. How much it had meant he was not sure,—enough to leave no hope or chance for

him, he had believed; but he had already fought his first battle, and it had been a harder one than Zeke Watkins or any of his comrades would ever engage in. He had returned and worked on the stony farm until dark. From dawn until dark he continued to work every secular day till September.

His bronzed face grew as stern as it was thin; and since he would no longer look at her, Susie Rolliffe began to steal an occasional and wondering glance at him "'tween meetings."

No one understood the young man or knew his plans except his patient, sad-eyed mother, and she learned more by her intuitions than from his spoken words. She idolized him, and he loved and revered her; but the terrible Puritan restraint paralyzed manifestations of affection. She was not taken by surprise when one evening he said quietly, "Mother, I guess I'll start in a day or two."

She could not repress a sort of gasping sob, however, but after a few moments was able to say steadily, "I supposed you were preparing to leave us."

"Yes, mother, I've been a-preparing. I've done my best to gather in everything that would help keep you and the children and the stock through the winter. The corn is all shocked, and the older children can help you husk it, and gather in the pumpkins, the beans, and the rest. As soon as I finish digging the potatoes I think I'll feel better to be in the lines around Boston. I'd have liked to have gone at first, but in order to fight as I ought I'd want to remember there was plenty to keep you and the children."

"I'm afraid, Zebulon, you've been fighting as well as working so hard all summer long. For my sake and the children's, you've been letting Susan Rolliffe think meanly of you."

"I can't help what she thinks, mother; I've tried not to act meanly."

"Perhaps the God of the widow and the fatherless will shield and bless you, my son. Be that as it may," she added with a heavy sigh, "conscience and His will must guide in everything. If He says go forth to battle, what am I that I should stay you?" Although

she did not dream of the truth, the Widow Jarvis was a disciplined soldier herself. To her, faith meant unquestioning submission and obedience; she had been taught to revere a jealous and an exacting God rather than a loving one. The heroism with which she pursued her toilsome, narrow, shadowed pathway was as sublime as it was unrecognized on her part. After she had retired she wept sorely, not only because her eldest child was going to danger, and perhaps death, but also for the reason that her heart clung to him so weakly and selfishly, as she believed. With a tenderness of which she was half-ashamed she filled his wallet with provisions which would add to his comfort, then, both to his surprise and her own, kissed him good-by. He left her and the younger brood with an aching heart of which there was little outward sign, and with no loftier ambition than to do his duty; she followed him with deep, wistful eyes till he, and next the long barrel of his rifle, disappeared in an angle of the road, and then her interrupted work was resumed.

Susie Rolliffe was returning from an errand

to a neighbor's when she heard the sound of long rapid steps.

A hasty glance revealed Zeb in something like pursuit. Her heart fluttered slightly, for he had looked so stern and sad of late that she had felt a little sorry for him in spite of herself. But since he could "wrastle" with nothing more formidable than a stony farm, she did not wish to have anything to say to him, or meet the embarrassment of explaining a tacit estrangement. She was glad, therefore, that her gate was so near, and passed in as if she had not recognized him. She heard his steps become slower and pause at the gate, and then almost in shame in being guilty of too marked discourtesy, she turned to speak, but hesitated in surprise, for now she recognized his equipment as a soldier.

"Why, Mr. Jarvis, where are you going?" she exclaimed.

A dull red flamed through the bronze of his thin cheeks as he replied awkwardly, "I thought I'd take a turn in the lines around Boston."

"Oh, yes," she replied mischievously, "take

a turn in the lines. Then we may expect you back by corn-husking?"

He was deeply wounded, and in his embarrassment could think of no other reply than the familiar words, "'Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.'"

"I can't help hoping, Mr. Jarvis, that neither you nor others will put it off too soon, —not, at least, while King George claims to be our master. When we're free I can stand any amount of boasting."

"You'll never hear boasting from me, Miss Susie;" and then an awkward silence fell between them.

Shyly and swiftly she raised her eyes. He looked so humble, deprecatory, and unsoldierlike that she could not repress a laugh. "I'm not a British cannon," she began, "that you should be so fearful."

His manhood was now too deeply wounded for further endurance even from her, for he suddenly straightened himself, and throwing his rifle over his shoulder, said sternly, "I'm not a coward. I never hung back from fear,

but to keep mother from charity, so I could fight or die as God wills. You may laugh at the man who never gave you anything but love, if you will, but you shall never laugh at my deeds. Call that boasting or not as you please," and he turned on his heel to depart.

His words and manner almost took away the girl's breath, so unexpected were they, and unlike her idea of the man. In that brief moment a fearless soldier had flashed himself upon her consciousness, revealing a spirit that would flinch at nothing,—that had not even quailed at the necessity of forfeiting her esteem, that his mother might not want. Humiliated and conscience-stricken that she had done him so much injustice, she rushed forward, crying, "Stop, Zebulon; please do not go away angry with me! I do not forget that we have been old friends and playmates. I'm willing to own that I've been wrong about you, and that's a good deal for a girl to do. I only wish I were a man, and I'd go with you."

Her kindness restored him to his awkward self again, and he stammered, "I wish you were—no, I don't—I merely stopped, thinking

you might have a message ; but I'd rather not take any to Zeke Watkins,—will, though, if you wish. It cut me all up to have you think I was afraid," and then he became speechless.

"But you acted as if you were afraid of me, and that seemed so ridiculous."

He looked at her a moment so earnestly with his dark, deep-set eyes that hers dropped. "Miss Susie," he said slowly, and speaking with difficulty, "I *am* afraid of you, next to God. I don't suppose I've any right to talk to you so, and I will say good-by. I was reckless when I spoke before. Perhaps—you'll go and see mother. My going is hard on her."

His eyes lingered on her a moment longer, as if he were taking his last look, then he turned slowly away.

"Good-by, Zeb," she called softly. "I didn't—I don't understand. Yes, I will go to see your mother."

Susie also watched him as he strode away. He thought he could continue on steadfastly without looking back, but when the road turned he also turned, fairly tugged right about by his loyal heart. She stood where he had left her,

and promptly waved her hand. He doffed his cap, and remained a moment in an attitude that appeared to her reverential, then passed out of view.

The moments lapsed, and still she stood in the gateway, looking down the vacant road as if dazed. Was it in truth awkward, bashful Zeb Jarvis who had just left her? He seemed a new and distinct being in contrast to the youth whom she had smiled at and in a measure scoffed at. The little Puritan maiden was not a reasoner, but a creature of impressions and swift intuitions. Zeb had not set his teeth, faced his hard duty, and toiled that long summer in vain. He had developed a manhood and a force which in one brief moment had enabled him to compel her recognition.

"He will face anything," she murmured. "He's afraid of only God and me; what a strange thing to say,—afraid of me next to God! Sounds kind of wicked. What can he mean? Zeke Watkins wasn't a bit afraid of me. As mother said, he was a little forward, and I was fool enough to take him at his own valuation. Afraid of me! How he stood with

his cap off! Do men ever love so? Is there a kind of reverence in some men's love? How absurd that a great strong, brave man, ready to face cannons, can bow down to such a little—" Her fragmentary exclamations ended in a peal of laughter, but tears dimmed her blue eyes.

Susie did visit Mrs. Jarvis, and although the reticent woman said little about her son, what she did say meant volumes to the girl who now had the right clew in interpreting his action and character. She too was reticent. New-England girls rarely gushed in those days, so no one knew she was beginning to understand. Her eyes, experienced in country work, were quick, and her mind active. "It looks as if a giant had been wrestling with this stony farm," she muttered.

Zeb received no ovations on his lonely tramp to the lines, and the vision of Susie Rolliffe waving her hand from the gateway would have blinded him to all the bright and admiring eyes in the world. He was hospitably entertained, however, when there was occasion; but the advent of men bound for the army had

become an old story. Having at last inquired his way to the position occupied by the Connecticut troops, he was assigned to duty in the same company with Zeke Watkins, who gave him but a cool reception, and sought to overawe him by veteran-like airs. At first poor Zeb was awkward enough in his unaccustomed duties, and no laugh was so scornful as that of his rival. Young Jarvis, however, had not been many days in camp before he guessed that Zeke's star was not in the ascendant. There was but little fighting required, but much digging of intrenchments, drill, and monotonous picket duty. Zeke did not take kindly to such tasks, and shirked them when possible. He was becoming known as the champion grumbler in the mess, and no one escaped his criticism, not even "Old Put,"—as General Putnam, who commanded the Connecticut quota, was called. Jarvis, on the other hand, performed his military duties as he had worked the farm, and rapidly acquired the bearing of a soldier. Indomitable Putnam gave his men little rest, and was ever seeking to draw his lines nearer to Boston and the

enemy's ships. He virtually fought with pick and shovel, and his working parties were often exposed to fire while engaged in fortifying the positions successively occupied. The Opinquake boys regarded themselves as well seasoned to such rude compliments, and were not a little curious to see how Zeb would handle a shovel with cannon-balls whizzing uncomfortably near. The opportunity soon came. Old Put himself could not have been more coolly oblivious than the raw recruit. At last a ball smashed his shovel to smithereens; he quietly procured another and went on with his work. Then his former neighbors gave him a cheer, while his captain clapped him on the shoulder, and said, "Promote you to be a veteran on the spot!"

The days had grown shorter, colder, and drearier, and the discomforts of camp-life harder to endure. There were few tents even for the officers, and the men were compelled to improvise such shelter as circumstances permitted. Huts of stone, wood, and brush, and barricades against the wind, lined the hillside, and the region already was denuded of almost

everything that would burn. Therefore, when December came, Zeke Watkins found that even a fire was a luxury not to be had without trouble. He had become thoroughly disgusted with a soldier's life, and the military glory which had at first so dazzled him now wore the aspect of the wintry sky. He had recently sought and attained the only promotion for which his captain now deemed him fitted,—that of cook for about a dozen of his comrades; and the close of the December day found him preparing the meagre supper which the limited rations permitted. By virtue of his office, Zeke was one of the best-fed men in the army, for if there were any choice morsels he could usually manage to secure them; still, he was not happy. King George and Congress were both pursuing policies inconsistent with his comfort, and he sighed more and more frequently for the wide kitchen-hearth of his home, which was within easy visiting distance of the Rolliffe farm-house. His term of enlistment expired soon, and he was already counting the days. He was not alone in his discontent, for there was much homesickness

and disaffection among the Connecticut troops. Many had already departed, unwilling to stay an hour after the expiration of their terms; and not a few had anticipated the periods which legally released them from duty. The organization of the army was so loose that neither appeals nor threats had much influence, and Washington, in deep solicitude, saw his troops melting away.

It was dark by the time the heavy tramp of the working party was heard returning from the fortifications. The great mess pot, partly filled with pork and beans, was bubbling over the fire; Zeke, shifting his position from time to time to avoid the smoke which the wind, as if it had a spite against him, blew in his face, was sourly contemplating his charge and his lot, bent on grumbling to the others with even greater gusto than he had complained to himself. His comrades carefully put away their intrenching tools, for they were held responsible for them, and then gathered about the fire, clamoring for supper.

"Zeke, you lazy loon," cried Nat Atkinson, "how many pipes have you smoked to-day?

If you'd smoke less and forage and dun the commissary more, we'd have a little fresh meat once in a hundred years."

"Yes, just about once in a hundred years!" snarled Zeke.

"*You* find something to keep fat on, anyhow. We'll broil you some cold night. Trot out your beans if there's nothing else."

"Growl away," retorted Zeke. "'Twon't be long before I'll be eating chickens and pumpkin-pie in Opinquake, instead of cooking beans and rusty pork for a lot of hungry wolves."

"You'd be the hungriest wolf of the lot if you'd 'a' been picking and shovelling frozen ground all day."

"I didn't 'list to be a ditch-digger!" said Zeke. "I thought I was going to be a soldier."

"And you turned out a cook!" quietly remarked Zeb Jarvis.

"Well, my hero of the smashed shovel, what do you expect to be,—Old Put's successor? You know, fellows, it's settled that you're to dig your way into Boston, tunnel under the water when you come to it. Of course Put will die

of old age before you get half there. Zeb'll be the chap of all others to command a division of shovellers. I see you with a pickaxe strapped on your side instead of a sword."

"Lucky I'm not in command now," replied Zeb, "or you'd shovel dirt under fire to the last hour of your enlistment. I'd give grumblers like you something to grumble about. See here, fellows, I'm sick of this seditious talk in our mess. The Connecticut men are getting to be the talk of the army. You heard a squad of New-Hampshire boys jeer at us to-day, and ask, 'When are ye going home to mother?' You ask, Zeke Watkins, what I expect to be. I expect to be a soldier, and obey orders as long as Old Put and General Washington want a man. All I ask is to be home summers long enough to keep mother and the children off the town. Now what do you expect to be after you give up your cook's ladle?"

"None o' your business."

"He's going home to court Susie Rolliffe," cried Nat Atkinson. "They'll be married in the spring, and go into the chicken business. That'd just suit Zeke."

"It would not suit Susie Rolliffe," said Zeb, hotly. "A braver, better girl doesn't breathe in the colonies, and the man that says a slurring word against her's got to fight me."

"What! Has she given Zeke the mitten for your sake, Zeb?" piped little Hiram Woodbridge.

"She hasn't given me anything, and I've got no claim; but she is the kind of girl that every fellow from Opinquake should stand up for. We all know that there is nothing chicken-hearted about her."

"Right, by George,—George W., I mean, and not the king," responded Hiram Woodbridge. "Here's to her health, Zeb, and your success! I believe she'd rather marry a soldier than a cook."

"Thank you," said Zeb. "You stand as good a chance as I do; but don't let's bandy her name about in camp any more'n we would our mothers'. The thing for us to do now is to show that the men from Connecticut have as much backbone as any other fellows in the army, North or South. Zeke may laugh at

Old Put's digging, but you'll soon find that he'll pick his way to a point where he can give the Britishers a dig under the fifth rib. We've got the best general in the army. Washington, with all his Southern style, believes in him and relies on him. Whether their time's up or not, it's a burning shame that so many of his troops are sneaking off home."

"It's all very well for you to talk, Zeb Jarvis," growled Zeke. "You haven't been here very long yet; and you stayed at home when others started out to fight. Now that you've found that digging and not fighting is the order of the day, you're just suited. It's the line of soldiering you are cut out for. When fighting men and not ditch-diggers are wanted, you'll find me—"

"All right, Watkins," said the voice of Captain Dean from without the circle of light. "According to your own story you are just the kind of man needed to-night,—no ditch-digging on hand, but dangerous service. I detail you, for you've had rest compared with the other men. I ask for volunteers from those who've been at work all day."

Zeb Jarvis was on his feet instantly, and old Ezra Stokes also began to rise with difficulty. "No, Stokes," resumed the officer, "you can't go. I know you've suffered with the rheumatism all day, and have worked well in spite of it. For to-night's work I want young fellows with good legs and your spirit. How is it you're here anyhow, Stokes? Your time's up."

"We ain't into Boston yet," was the quiet reply.

"So you want to stay?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then you shall cook for the men till you're better. I won't keep so good a soldier, though, at such work any longer than I can help. Your good example and that of the gallant Watkins has brought out the whole squad. I think I'll put Jarvis in command, though; Zeke might be rash, and attempt the capture of Boston before morning;" and the facetious captain, who had once been a neighbor, concluded, "Jarvis, see that every man's piece is primed and ready for use. Be at my hut in fifteen minutes." Then he passed on to the other camp-fires.

In a few minutes Ezra Stokes was alone by the fire, almost roasting his lame leg, and grumbling from pain and the necessity of enforced inaction. He was a taciturn, middle-aged man, and had been the only bachelor of mature years in Opinquake. Although he rarely said much, he had been a great listener, and no one had been better versed in neighborhood affairs. In brief, he had been the village cobbler, and had not only taken the measure of Susie Rolliffe's little foot, but also of her spirit. Like herself, he had been misled at first by the forwardness of Zeke Watkins and the apparent backwardness of Jarvis. Actual service had changed his views very decidedly. When Zeb appeared he had watched the course of this bashful suitor with interest which had rapidly ripened into warm but undemonstrative good-will. The young fellow had taken pains to relieve the older man, had carried his tools for him, and more than once with his strong hands had almost rubbed the rheumatism out of the indomitable cobbler's leg. He had received but slight thanks, and had acted as if he didn't care for any. Stokes was not a man

to return favors in words; he brooded over his gratitude as if it were a grudge. "I'll get even with that young Jarvis yet," he muttered, as he nursed his leg over the fire. "I know he worships the ground that little Rolliffe girl treads on, though she don't tread on much at a time. She never trod on me nuther, though I've had her foot in my hand more'n once. She looked at the man that made her shoes as if she would like to make him happier. When a little tot, she used to say I could come and live with her when I got too old to take care of myself. Lame as I be, I'd walk to Opinquake to give her a hint in her choosin'. Guess Hi Woodbridge is right, and she wouldn't be long in making up her mind betwixt a soger and a cook,—a mighty poor one at that. Somehow or nuther I must let her know before Zeke Watkins sneaks home and parades around as a soldier 'bove ditch-digging. I've taken his measure.

"He'll be putting on veteran airs, telling big stories of what he's going to do when soldiers are wanted, and drilling such fools as believe in him. Young gals are often taken by

such strutters, and think that men like Jarvis who darsn't speak for themselves are of no account. But I'll put a spoke in Zeke's wheel, if I have to get the captain to write."

It thus may be gathered that the cobbler had much to say to himself when alone, though so taciturn to others.

The clouds along the eastern horizon were stained with red before the reconnoitring party returned. Stokes had managed, by hobbling about, to keep up the fire and to fill the mess-kettle with the inevitable pork and beans. The hungry, weary men therefore gave their new cook a cheer when they saw the good fire and provision awaiting them. A moment later, however, Jarvis observed how lame Stokes had become; he took the cobbler by the shoulder and sat him down in the warmest nook, saying, "I'll be assistant cook until you are better. As Zeke says, I'm a wolf sure enough; but as soon's the beast's hunger is satisfied, I'll rub that leg of yours till you'll want to dance a jig;" and with the ladle wrung from Stokes's reluctant hand, he began stirring the seething contents of the kettle.

Then little Hi Woodbridge piped in his shrill voice, "Another cheer for our assistant cook and ditch-digger! I say, Zeke, wouldn't you like to tell Ezra that Zeb has showed himself fit for something more than digging? You expressed your opinion very plain last night, and may have a different one now."

Zeke growled something inaudible, and stalked to his hut in order to put away his equipments.

"I'm cook-in-chief yet," Stokes declared; "and not a bean will any one of you get till you report all that happened."

"Well," piped Hi, "you may stick a feather in your old cap, Ezra, for our Opinquake lad captured a British officer last night, and Old Put is pumping him this blessed minute."

"Well, well, that is news. It must have been Zeke who did that neat job," exclaimed Stokes, ironically; "he's been a-pining for the soldier business."

"No, no; Zeke's above such night scrimmages. He wants to swim the bay and walk right into Boston in broad daylight, so everybody can see him. Come, Zeb, tell how it

happened. It was so confounded dark, no one can tell but you."

"There isn't much to tell that you fellows don't know," was Zeb's laconic answer. "We had sneaked down on the neck so close to the enemy's lines—"

"Yes, yes, Zeb Jarvis," interrupted Stokes, "that's the kind of sneaking you're up to,—close to the enemy's lines. Go on."

"Well, I crawled up so close that I saw a Britisher going the round of the sentinels, and I pounced on him and brought him out on the run, that's all."

"Oho! you both ran away, then? That wasn't good soldiering either, was it, Zeke?" commented Stokes, in his dry way.

"It's pretty good soldiering to stand fire within an inch of your nose," resumed Hi, who had become a loyal friend and adherent of his tall comrade. "Zeb was so close on the Britisher when he fired his pistol that we saw the faces of both in the flash; and a lot of bullets sung after us, I can tell you, as we dusted out of those diggin's."

"Compliments of General Putnam to Ser-

geant Zebulon Jarvis," said an orderly, riding out of the dim twilight of the morning. "The general requests your presence at headquarters."

"Sergeant! promoted! Another cheer for Zeb!" and the Opinquake boys gave it with hearty good-will.

"Jerusalem, fellows! I'd like to have a chance at those beans before I go!" but Zeb promptly tramped off with the orderly.

When he returned he was subjected to a fire of questions by the two or three men still awake, but all they could get out of him was that he had been given a good breakfast. From Captain Dean, who was with the general at the time of the examination, it leaked out that Zeb was in the line of promotion to a rank higher than that of sergeant.

The next few days passed uneventfully; and Zeke was compelled to resume the pick and shovel again. Stokes did his best to fulfil his duties, but it had become evident to all that the exposure of camp would soon disable him utterly. Jarvis and Captain Dean persuaded him to go home for the winter, and the little squad

raised a sum which enabled him to make the journey in a stage. Zeke, sullen toward his jeering comrades, but immensely elated in secret, had shaken the dust—snow and slush rather—of camp-life from his feet the day before. He had the grace to wait till the time of his enlistment expired, and that was more than could be said of many.

It spoke well for the little Opinquake quota that only two others besides Zeke availed themselves of their liberty. Poor Stokes was almost forced away, consoled by the hope of returning in the spring. Zeb was sore-hearted on the day of Zeke's departure. His heart was in the Connecticut Valley also. No message had come to him from Susie Rolliffe. Those were not the days of swift and frequent communication. Even Mrs. Jarvis had written but seldom, and her missives were brief. Mother-love glowed through the few quaint and scriptural phrases like heat in anthracite coals. All that poor Zeb could learn from them was that Susie Rolliffe had kept her word and had been to the farm more than once ; but the girl had been as reticent as the

mother. Zeke was now on his way home to prosecute his suit in person, and Zeb well knew how forward and plausible he could be. There was no deed of daring that he would not promise to perform after spring opened, and Zeb reasoned gloomily that a present lover, impassioned and importunate, would stand a better chance than an absent one who had never been able to speak for himself.

When it was settled that Stokes should return to Opinquake, Zeb determined that he would not give up the prize to Zeke without one decisive effort ; and as he was rubbing the cobbler's leg, he stammered, "I say, Ezra, will you do me a turn? 'Twon't be so much, what I ask, except that I'll like you to keep mum about it, and you're a good hand at keeping mum."

"I know what yer driving at, Zeb. Write yer letter and I'll deliver it with my own hands."

"Well, now I'm satisfied, I can stay on and fight it out with a clear mind. When Zeke marched away last summer, I thought it was all up with me ; and I can tell you that any

fighting that's to do about Boston will be fun compared with the fighting I did while hoeing corn and mowing grass. But I don't believe that Susie Rolliffe is promised to Zeke Watkins, or any one else yet, and I'm going to give her a chance to refuse me plump."

"That's the way to do it, Zeb," said the bachelor cobbler, with an emphasis that would indicate much successful experience. "Asking a girl plump is like standing up in a fair fight. It gives the girl a chance to bowl you over, if that's her mind, so there can't be any mistake about it; and it seems to me the women-folks ought to have all the chances that in any way belong to them. They have got few enough anyhow."

"And you think it'll end in my being bowled over?"

"How should I know, or you either, unless you make a square trial? You're such a strapping, fighting feller that nothing but a cannon-ball or a woman ever will knock you off your pins."

"See here, Ezra Stokes, the girl of my heart may refuse me just as plump as I offer

myself; and if that's her mind she has a right to do it. But I don't want either you or her to think I won't stand on my feet. I won't even fight any more recklessly than my duty requires. I have a mother to take care of, even if I never have a wife."

"I'll put in a few pegs right along to keep in mind what you say; and I'll give you a fair show by seeing to it that the girl gets your letter before Zeke can steal a march on you."

"That's all I ask," said Zeb, with compressed lips. "She shall choose between us. It's hard enough to write, but it will be a sight easier than facing her. Not a word of this to another soul, Ezra; but I'm not going to use you like a mail-carrier, but a friend. After all, there are few in Opinquake, I suppose, but know I'd give my eyes for her, so there isn't much use of my putting on secret airs."

"I'm not a talker, and you might have sent your letter by a worse messenger'n me," was the laconic reply.

Zeb had never written a love-letter, and was at a loss how to begin or end it. But time

pressed, and he had to say what was uppermost in his mind. It ran as follows :—

"I don't know how to write so as to give my words weight. I cannot come home ; I will not come as long as mother and the children can get on without me. And men are needed here ; men *are* needed. The general fairly pleads with the soldiers to stay. Stokes would stay if he could. We're almost driving him home. I know you will be kind to him, and remember he has few to care for him. I cannot speak for myself in person very soon, if ever. Perhaps I could not if I stood before you. You laugh at me ; but if you knew how I love you and remember you, how I honor and almost worship you in my heart, you might understand me better. Why is it strange I should be afraid of you? Only God has more power over me than you. Will you be my wife? I will do anything to win you that *you* can ask. Others will plead with you in person. Will you let this letter plead for the absent?"

Zeb went to the captain's quarters and got some wax with which to seal this appeal, then saw Stokes depart with the feeling that his destiny was now at stake.

Meanwhile Zeke Watkins, with a squad of homeward-bound soldiers, was trudging toward Opinquake. They soon began to look into one another's faces in something like dismay. But little provision was in their wallets when they had started, for there was little to draw upon, and that furnished grudgingly, as may well be supposed. Zeke had not cared. He remembered the continuous feasting that had attended his journey to camp, and supposed that he would only have to present himself to the road-side farmhouses in order to enjoy the fat of the land. This hospitality he proposed to repay abundantly by camp reminiscences in which it would not be difficult to insinuate that the hero of the scene was present.

In contrast to these rose-hued expectations, doors were slammed in their faces, and they were treated little better than tramps. "I suppose the people near Boston have been called on too often and imposed on too," Zeke reasoned rather ruefully. "When we once get over the Connecticut border we'll begin to find ourselves at home;" and spurred by hunger and cold, as well as hope, they pushed on

desperately, subsisting on such coarse provisions as they could obtain, sleeping in barns when it stormed, and not infrequently by a fire in the woods. At last they passed the Connecticut border, and led by Zeke they urged their way to a large farm-house, at which, but a few months before, the table had groaned under rustic dainties, and feather-beds had luxuriously received the weary recruits bound to the front. They approached the opulent farm in the dreary dark of the evening, and pursued by a biting east wind laden with snow. Not only the weather, but the very dogs seemed to have a spite against them ; and the family had to rush out to call them off.

"Weary soldiers ask for shelter," began Zeke.

"Of course you're bound for the lines," said the matronly housewife. "Come in."

Zeke thought they would better enter at once, before explaining ; and truly the large kitchen, with a great fire blazing on the hearth, seemed like heaven. The door leading into the family sitting-room was open, and there was another fire, with the red-cheeked girls and

the white-haired grandsire before it, their eyes turned expectantly toward the newcomers. Instead of hearty welcome, there was a questioning look on every face, even on that of the kitchen-maid. Zeke's four companions had a sort of hang-dog look,—for they had been cowed by the treatment received along the road; but he tried to bear himself confidently, and began with an insinuating smile, "Perhaps I should hardly expect you to remember me. I passed this way last summer—"

"Passed this way last summer?" repeated the matron, her face growing stern. "We who cannot fight are ready and glad to share all we have with those who fight for us. Since you carry arms we might very justly think you are hastening forward to use them."

"These are our own arms; we furnished them ourselves," Zeke hastened to say.

"Oh, indeed," replied the matron, coldly; "I supposed that not only the weapons, but the ones who carry them, belonged to the country. I hope you are not deserting from the army."

"I assure you we are not. Our terms of enlistment have expired."

"And your country's need was over at the same moment? Are you hastening home at this season to plough and sow and reap?"

"Well, madam, after being away so long we felt like having a little comfort and seeing the folks. We stayed as long as we agreed. When spring opens, or before, if need be—"

"Pardon me, sir; the need is now. The country is not to be saved by men who make bargains like day-laborers, and who quit when the hour is up, but by soldiers who give themselves to their country as they would to their wives and sweethearts. My husband and sons are in the army you have deserted. General Washington has written to our governor asking whether an example should not be made of the men who have deserted the cause of their country at this critical time when the enemy are receiving re-enforcements. We are told that Connecticut men have brought disgrace on our colony and have imperilled the whole army. You feel like taking comfort and seeing the folks. The folks do not feel like seeing you. My husband and the brave men in the lines are in all the more danger because of

your desertion, for a soldier's time never expires when the enemy is growing stronger and threatening every home in the land. If all followed your example, the British would soon be upon your heels, taking from us our honor and our all. We are not ignorant of the critical condition of our army; and I can tell you, sir, that if many more of our men come home, the women will take their places."

Zeke's companions succumbed to the stern arraignment, and after a brief whispered consultation one spoke for the rest. "Madam," he said, "you put it in a way that we hadn't realized before. We'll right-about-face and march back in the morning, for we feel that we'd rather face all the British in Boston than any more Connecticut women."

"Then, sirs, you shall have supper and shelter and welcome," was the prompt reply.

Zeke assumed an air of importance as he said, "There are reasons why I must be at home for a time, but I not only expect to return, but also to take many back with me."

"I trust your deeds may prove as large as your words," was the chilly reply; and

then he was made to feel that he was barely tolerated. Some hints from his old associates added to the disfavor which the family took but little pains to conceal. There was a large vein of selfish calculation in Zeke's nature, and he was not to be swept away by any impulses. He believed he could have a prolonged visit home, yet manage so admirably that when he returned he would be followed by a squad of recruits, and chief of all he would be the triumphant suitor of Susie Rolliffe. Her manner in parting had satisfied him that he had made so deep an impression that it would be folly not to follow it up. He trudged the remainder of the journey alone, and secured tolerable treatment by assuring the people that he was returning for recruits for the army. He reached home in the afternoon of Christmas; and although the day was almost completely ignored in the Puritan household, yet Mrs. Watkins forgot country, Popery, and all, in her mother-love, and Zeke supped on the finest turkey of the flock. Old Mr. Watkins, it is true, looked rather grim, but the reception had been reassuring in the main; and Zeke had resolved on

a line of tactics which would make him, as he believed, the military hero of the town. After he had satisfied an appetite which had been growing ever since he left camp, he started to call on Susie in all the bravery of his best attire, filled with sanguine expectations inspired by memories of the past and recent potations of cider.

Meanwhile Susie had received a guest earlier in the day. The stage had stopped at the gate where she had stood in the September sunshine and waved her bewildered farewell to Zeb. There was no bewilderment or surprise now at her strange and unwonted sensations. She had learned why she had stood looking after him dazed and spellbound. Under the magic of her own light irony she had seen her drooping rustic lover transformed into the ideal man who could face anything except her unkindness. She had guessed the deep secret of his timidity. It was a kind of fear of which she had not dreamed, and which touched her innermost soul.

When the stage stopped at the gate, and she saw the driver helping out Ezra Stokes, a swift

presentiment made her sure that she would hear from one soldier who was more to her than all the generals. She was soon down the walk, the wind sporting in her light-gold hair, supporting the cobbler on the other side.

"Ah, Miss Susie!" he said, "I am about worn out, sole and upper. It breaks my heart, when men are so sorely needed, to be thrown aside like an old shoe."

The girl soothed and comforted him, ensconced him by the fireside, banishing the chill from his heart, while Mrs. Rolliffe warmed his blood by a strong, hot drink. Then the mother hastened away to get dinner, while Susie sat down near, nervously twisting and untwisting her fingers, with questions on her lips which she dared not utter, but which brought blushes to her cheeks. Stokes looked at her and sighed over his lost youth, yet smiled as he thought, "Guess I'll get even with that Zeb Jarvis to-day." Then he asked, "Isn't there any one you would like to hear about in camp?"

She blushed deeper still, and named every one who had gone from Opinquake except Zeb. At last she said a little ironically, "I

suppose Ezekiel Watkins is almost thinking about being a general about this time?"

"Hasn't he been here telling you what he is thinking about?"

"Been here! Do you mean to say he has come home?"

"He surely started for home. All the generals and a yoke of oxen couldn't 'a' kept him in camp, he was so homesick,—lovesick too, I guess. Powerful compliment to you, Miss Susie," added the politic cobbler, feeling his way, "that you could draw a man straight from his duty like one of these 'ere stump-extractors."

"No compliment to me at all!" cried the girl, indignantly. "He little understands me who seeks my favor by coming home at a time like this. The Connecticut women are up in arms at the way our men are coming home. No offence to you, Mr. Stokes. You're sick, and should come; but I'd like to go myself to show some of the strong young fellows what we think of them."

"Coming home was worse than rheumatism to me, and I'm going back soon's I kin walk

without a cane. Wouldn't 'a' come as 'tis, if that Zeb Jarvis hadn't jes' packed me off. By Jocks! I thought you and he was acquainted, but you don't seem to ask arter him."

"I felt sure he would try—I heard he was doing his duty," she replied with averted face.

"Zeke Watkins says he's no soldier at all,—nothing but a dirt-digger."

For a moment, as the cobbler had hoped, Susie forgot her blushes and secret in her indignation. "Zeke Watkins indeed!" she exclaimed. "He'd better not tell *me* any such story. I don't believe there's a braver, truer man in the— Well," she added in sudden confusion, "he hasn't run away and left others to dig their way into Boston, if that's the best way of getting there."

"Ah, I'm going to get even with him yet," chuckled Stokes to himself. "Digging is only the first step, Miss Susie. When Old Put gets good and ready, you'll hear the thunder of the guns a'most in Opinquake."

"Well, Mr. Stokes," stammered Susie, resolving desperately on a short cut to the knowledge she craved, "you've seen Mr.

Jarvis a-soldiering. What do you think about it?"

"Well, now, that Zeb Jarvis is the sneakin'ist fellow—"

"What?" cried the girl, her face aflame.

"Wait till I get in a few more pegs," continued Stokes, coolly. "The other night he sneaked right into the enemy's lines and carried off a British officer as a hawk takes a chicken. The Britisher fired his pistol right under Zeb's nose; but, law! he didn't mind that any more'n a 'sketerbite. I call that soldiering, don't you? Anyhow, Old Put thought it was, and sent for him 'fore daylight, and made a sergeant of him. If I had as good a chance of gettin' rid of the rheumatiz as he has of bein' captain in six months, I'd thank the Lord."

Susie sat up very straight, and tried to look severely judicial; but her lip was quivering and her whole plump little form trembling with excitement and emotion. Suddenly she dropped her face in her hands and cried in a gust of tears and laughter, "He's just like grandfather; he'd face anything!"

"Anything in the 'tarnal universe, I guess, 'cept you, Miss Susie. I seed a cannon-ball smash a shovel in his hands, and he got another, and went on with his work cool as a cucumber. Then I seed him writin' a letter to you, and his hand trembled—"

"A letter to me!" cried the girl, springing up.

"Yes; 'ere it is. I was kind of pegging around till I got to that; and you know—"

But Susie was reading, her hands also trembling so she could scarcely hold the paper. "It's about you," she faltered, making one more desperate effort at self-preservation. "He says you'd stay if you could; that they almost drove you home. And he asks that I be kind to you, because there are not many to care for you—and—and—"

"Oh, Lord! never can get even with that Zeb Jarvis," groaned Ezra. "But you needn't tell me that's all the letter's about."

Her eyes were full of tears, yet not so full but that she saw the plain, closing words in all their significance. Swiftly the letter went to her lips, then was thrust into her bosom, and

she seized the cobbler's hand, exclaiming, "Yes, I will! I will! You shall stay with us and be one of us!" and in her excitement she put her left hand caressingly on his shoulder.

"*Susan!*" exclaimed Mrs. Rolliffe, who entered at that moment, and looked aghast at the scene.

"Yes, I *will!*" exclaimed Susie, too wrought up now for restraint.

"Will what?" gasped the mother.

"Be Zebulon Jarvis's wife. He's asked me plump and square, like a soldier; and I'll answer as grandma did, and like grandma I'll face anything for his sake."

"*Well,* this *is* suddent!" exclaimed Mrs. Rolliffe, dropping into a chair. "Susan, do you think it is becoming and seemly for a young woman—"

"Oh, mother dear, there's no use of your trying to make a prim Puritan maiden of me. Zeb doesn't fight like a deacon, and I can't love like one. Ha! ha! ha! to think that great soldier is afraid of little me, and nothing else! It's too funny and heavenly—"

"Susan, I am dumbfounded at your behavior!"

At this moment Mr. Rolliffe came in from the wood-lot, and he was dazed by the wonderful news also. In his eagerness to get even with Zeb, the cobbler enlarged and expatiated till he was hoarse. When he saw that the parents were almost as proud as the daughter over their prospective son-in-law, he relapsed into his old taciturnity, declaring he had talked enough for a month.

Susie, the only child, who apparently had inherited all the fire and spirit of her fighting ancestors, darted out, and soon returned with her rosebud of a face enveloped in a great calyx of a woollen hood.

"Where are you going?" exclaimed her parents.

"You've had the news. I guess Mother Jarvis has the next right." And she was off over the hills with almost the lightness and swiftness of a snowbird.

In due time Zeke appeared, and smiled encouragingly on Mrs. Rolliffe, who sat knitting by the kitchen fire. The matron did not rise,

and gave him but a cool salutation. He discussed the coldness of the weather awkwardly for a few moments, and then ventured, "Is Miss Susan at home?"

"No, sir," replied Mrs. Rolliffe; "she's gone to make a visit to her mother-in-law that is to be, the Widow Jarvis. Ezra Stokes is sittin' in the next room, sent home sick. Perhaps you'd like to talk over camp-life with him."

Not even the cider now sustained Zeke. He looked as if a cannon-ball had wrecked all his hopes and plans instead of a shovel. "Good-evening, Mrs. Rolliffe," he stammered; "I guess I'll—I'll—go home."

Poor Mrs. Jarvis had a spiritual conflict that day which she never forgot. Susie's face had flashed at the window near which she had sat spinning, and sighing perhaps that Nature had not provided feathers or fur for a brood like hers; then the girl's arms were about her neck, the news was stammered out—for the letter could never be shown to any one—in a way that tore primness to tatters. The widow tried to act as if it were a dispensation of

Providence which should be received in solemn gratitude; but before she knew it she was laughing and crying, kissing her sweet-faced daughter, or telling how good and brave Zeb had been when his heart was almost breaking.

Compunction had already seized upon the widow. "Susan," she began, "I fear we are not mortifyin' the flesh as we ought—"

"No mortifying just yet, if you please," cried Susie. "The most important thing of all is yet to be done. Zeb hasn't heard the news; just think of it! You must write and tell him that I'll help you spin the children's clothes and work the farm; that we'll face everything in Opinquake as long as Old Put needs men. Where is the ink-horn? I'll sharpen a pen for you and one for me, and *such* news as he'll get! Wish I could tell him, though, and see the great fellow tremble once more. Afraid of me! Ha! ha! ha! that's the funniest thing— Why, Mother Jarvis, this is Christmas Day!"

"So it is," said the widow, in an awed tone. "Susie, my heart misgives me that all

this should have happened on a day of which Popery has made so much."

"No, no," cried the girl. "Thank God it *is* Christmas! and hereafter I shall keep Christmas as long as love is love and God is good."